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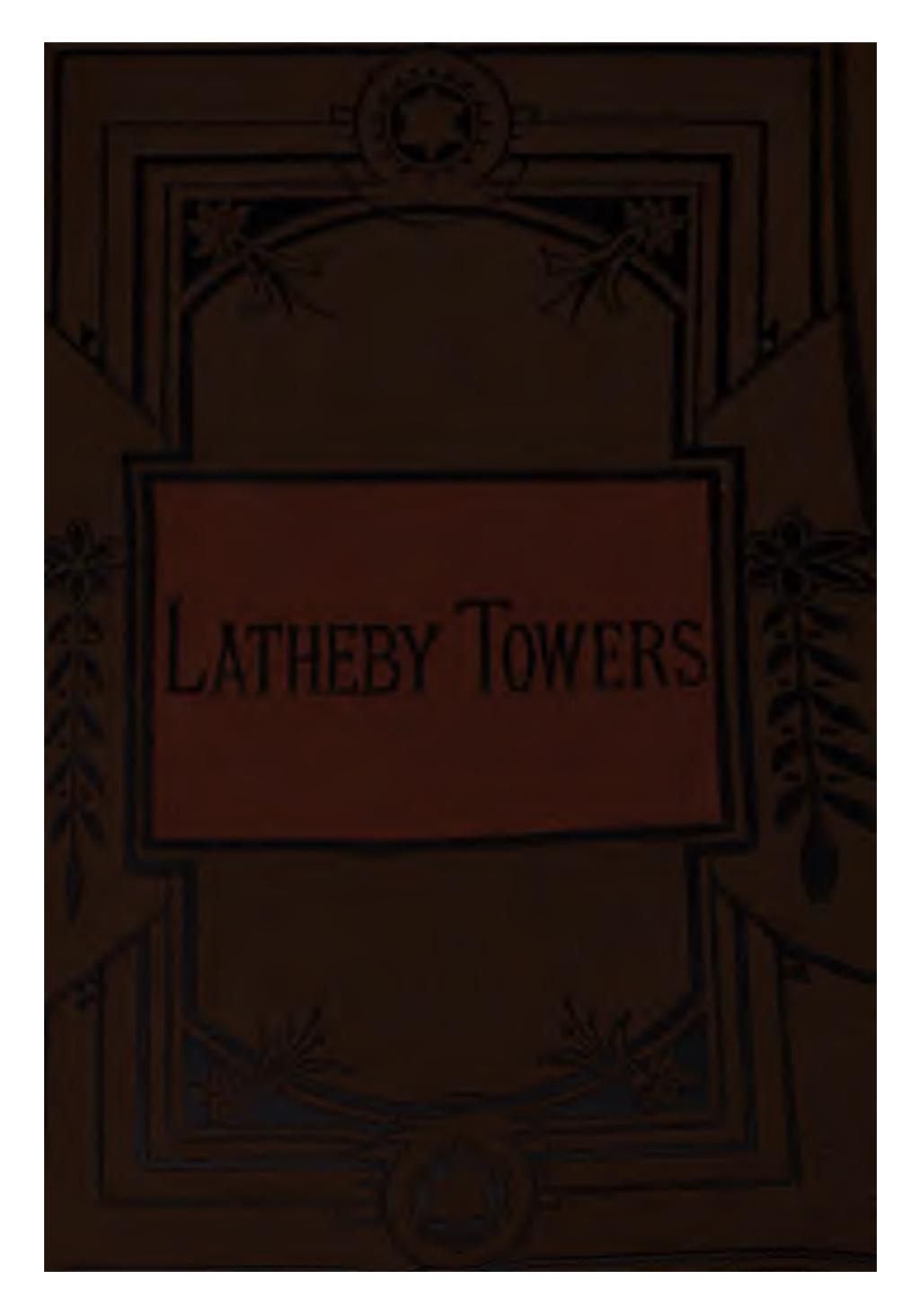
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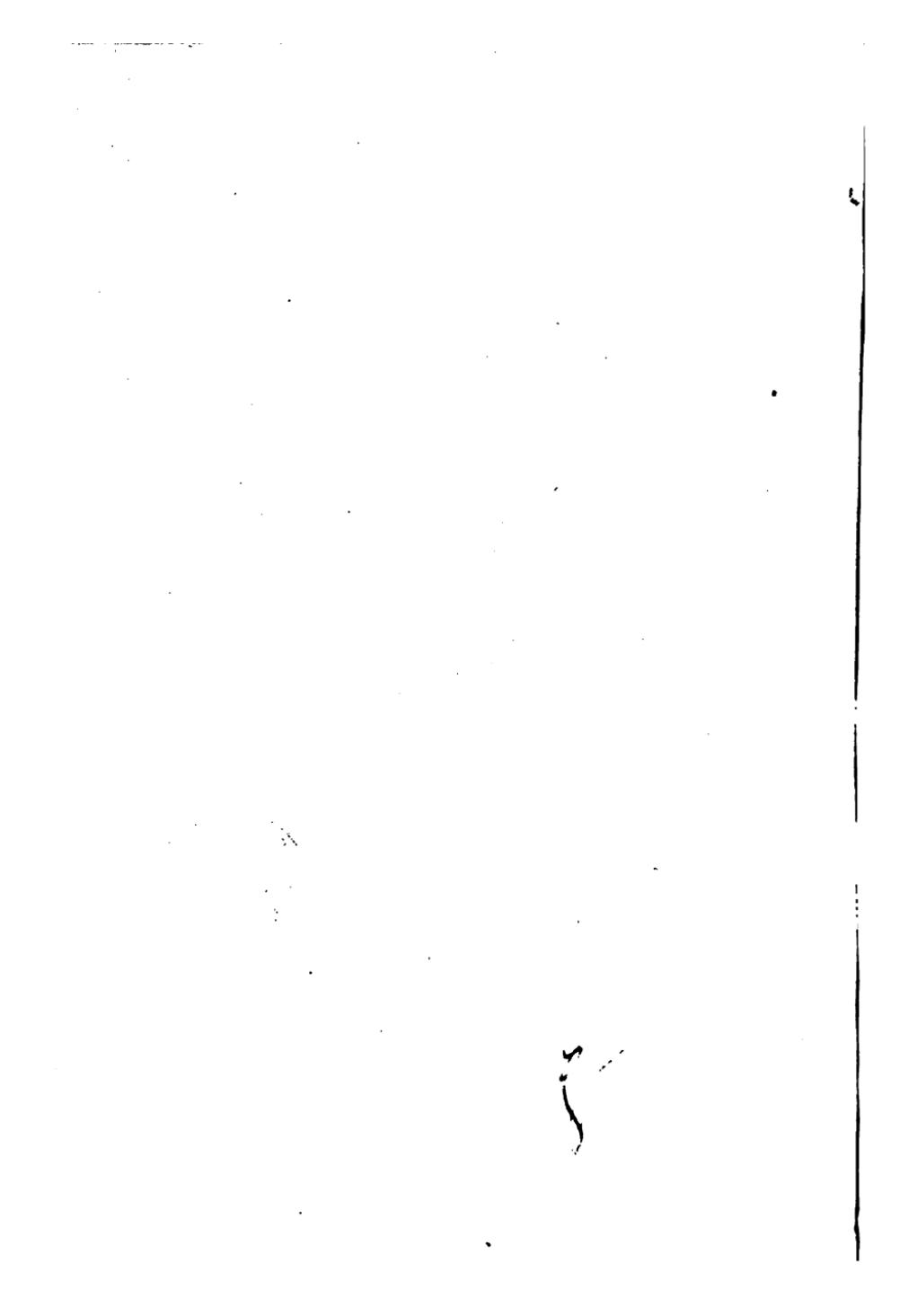
LATHEBY TOWERS



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LATHEBY TOWERS.

A Novel.

BY

ALICE CORKRAN,

A U T H O R O F " B E S S I E L A N G . "

" Meadows trim with daisies pied,
Shallow brooks, and rivers wide :
Towers and battlements it sees
Bosom'd high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some Beauty lies,
The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes."

L'ALLEGRO.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

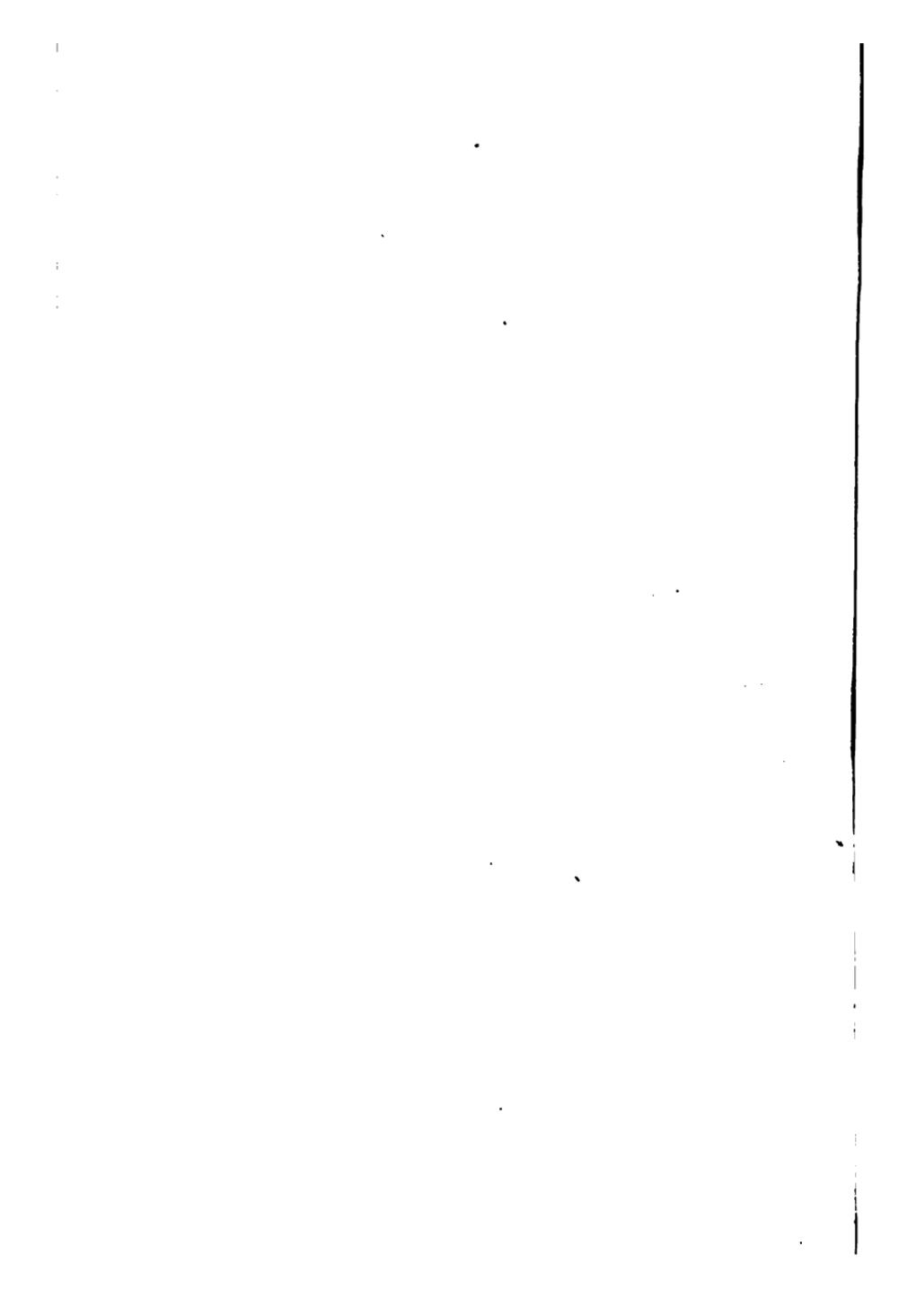
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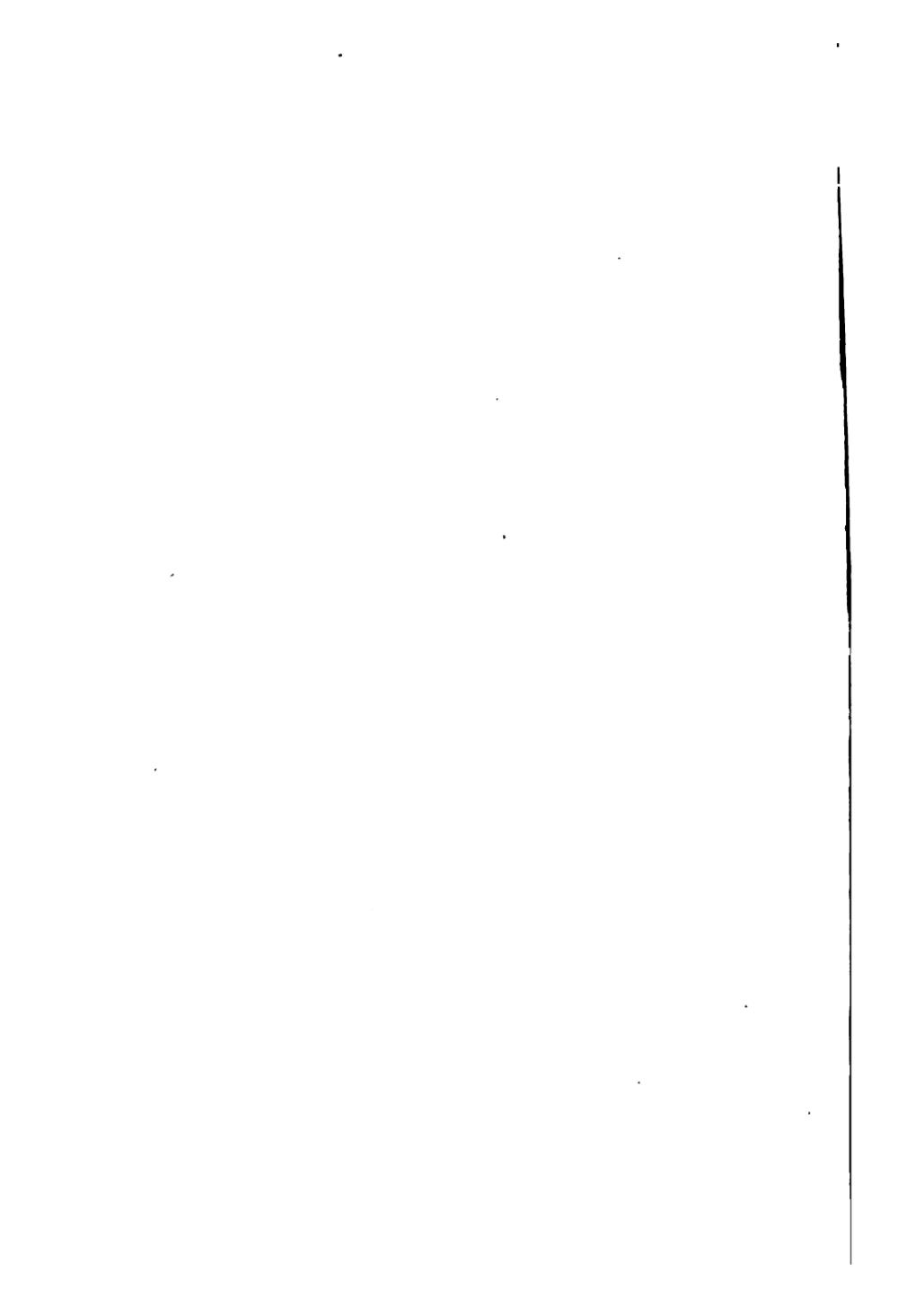
TO THE MEMORY

OF

My Dearest Friend,

UNA HAWTHORNE.

January, 1879.



CLARA SAVILLE.

CHAPTER I.

“ Proputty,—proputty,—proputty,—
That’s what I ‘ears ’em säay—
Proputty,—proputty,—proputty——”

Northern Farmer.

FAREHAM village, leaning up against a hill and stretching towards the sea, with its snug farm-houses girdled by gardens and orchards, its square-towered abbey church guarding its dead, and its old mansion—Latheby Towers—dominating all from amidst a belt of wood, is as prosperous, comfortable, slow-going a village as you would care to see. The railway to Henshaw, a manu-

facturing town some ten miles distant, has within the last twelve years brought it, still unspoilt, however, within the reach of civilization. It is a corner that would be difficult to spoil, for nature has lavished liberally a store of loveliness upon it: stretches of breezy fields; broad expanses of heather-covered moorlands; green-lit glens, flower-carpeted, bird-inhabited; and all surrounded with encircling zones of blue. Here, the sea; there, the earth melting into heaven. It has its river, too, fed by waterfalls, flowing through narrow banks rich and lush with water-flowers. Occasionally the river dashes over rocks; but it has its deep and silent places, and one of these has a history. One summer of drought, when the bed was nearly dry, the body of a poor pedlar, who had missed his last round, was found drowned, wedged between two stones. The fragments of clothes he wore were still entangled in some

old roots. There it had been left by the tide, which was carrying it off to the sea. This spot has ever since been known as the "Dead Man's Pool," and the Fareham folk do not care to pass it after dark. Even in calm sunshine ghostly shadows haunt the place, all the more distinctly felt from the contrast of the surrounding blitheness. Fareham Abbey has monastic associations that no Calvinistic reprobation can expel. In its square tower is a library stocked with massively bound volumes, transcripts of the writings of the Fathers, of the Scriptures, of homilies made by the monks. The Farehamites attach little value to the collection, but visitors come at times to finger the vellum pages, and gaze at the writing that has the calm solemnity of a prayer.

As we look down upon the scene, the page which nature spreads before us records as plain as her finger can trace it that the

whole history of Fareham is resumed in the fortunes of the house whose towers lift themselves gaunt and crenellated against the sky, visible for miles around, brooding over the village like its fate. Fareham's history is the history of the Lathebys. In the church, on all sides, are monuments of the old family. Conspicuous among them is a tablet, adorned with a basso-rilievo group, representing Sir Hugh de Latheby, the founder of the family, booted and spurred, with flowing mantle and high ruff, saying his prayers, with Blanche his wife, *vis-à-vis*, and a promising young family of seven. To gaze on the angular-elbowed, flat-palmed, finger-joined piety of this effigy has quite an enlivening effect on Fareham spirits on a Sunday. It is like contemplating one's pedigree when shabbiness begins to set in at the extremities. There is also by the altar the tomb of Sir Basil Latheby, who was

killed in the civil wars defending the Towers against the Roundheads, lying by the side of the Lady Clementina, his hands crossed over his shield.

For nearly thirty years no Latheby had lived at the Towers. Sir Peter, the present baronet, since he had succeeded to the property, had lived almost entirely in Paris. He never married, though, heaven knows, he was fond enough of women. For some years past he had let the Towers. He mocked at England and English ways, and crossed the channel to his native land as seldom as possible. He had been a *roué* in his youth, and now in his old age he was a cynic. For the last twenty-five years he had retired to a *bijou* property close to Paris, furnished and laid out in the style of Louis XV. He collected snuff-boxes, sneered at every faith and enthusiasm, talked French like a Frenchman, and played whist every evening.

Fareham heard queer stories of the old man, from the agent who came quarterly to collect the rents. Sir Peter, from Passy, insisted upon his rents being paid to the day, and his agent had powers of attorney to turn out any lagging tenant, were he farmer or labourer. The baronet would hear of no complaints—“Let the hogs (so he called the labourers) see to their own sties.”

In spite of his sins, Sir Peter was esteemed by the farmers. He was a Latheby, and they preferred him to any other landlord. They had pocketed a certain sense of affront in the letting of the Towers to strangers. No Latheby had ever lived away from Fareham before. Yet it was something that the rents should still be paid to one of the old stock.

The entail expired with Sir Peter. Who was to have the property after him? It was expected in Fareham that it would go on

the Baronet's death to his nephew, the only son of his elder brother, George, who was the illegitimate son of Sir Montagu and the lady whom he afterwards married, and who died in giving birth to Sir Peter. There were some who asserted, with the irresponsible untrammelled freedom of tradition, that the lady had been Sir Montagu's wife all along—disregarding the date of the existing marriage licence which flatly contradicted them. They believed that the first marriage had to be kept secret. They had their own reasons for believing it.

The prospect that at the death of Sir Peter the landlord should be plain Mr. Latheby, and that the good old days would be over, when Sir this, or Sir that, came pat off the tongue, as Amen after prayers in church, had the depressing effect on the farmers as of having gone down in the world. Yet there was still the old name to cling to.

One day rumours reached Fareham, that, in his sixtieth year, Sir Peter was negotiating the sale of the property. The rumours gathered strength. It was at last confirmed, beyond the power of doubt, that the Towers and all their dependencies had passed into the hands of Mrs. Saville, the daughter of the wealthy brewer and speculator, who for some years past had rented the place. A gabled cottage, standing in its own grounds, called in the village the "Dower House"—for it was there that dowager ladies Latheby were wont to retire—was the only bit of property Sir Peter had reserved to himself in Fareham.

At first, Fareham imagination refused to admit the fact that the family was deposed. The old tales were afloat again. There was an impression abroad that there was something queer, and that the late parson knew it.

This topic had occasionally been a subject of discussion at the ale-house, "The Hare and Hounds." Farmer Harris, the patriarch of the village, who remembered Sir Montagu and his lady, and Sir Cecil before them, was looked up to, in his worsted night-cap, as though he were a chief-justice in his full-bottomed wig. The parish-clerk, however, took the lead in those discussions. He had a notion about a certain registry book, and none had a better right than he to have notions about it. There was an uncommon cramped look about the entry of the marriages in two or three of the pages. He had a notion, too, that Mr. Lasham, the late rector, who died of a fall from his horse, had no care for him to handle it much. There was nothing like a registry for making things be what they should be ; and there was no telling, but for that registry book, Mr. George might never

have run away, and there would be no Mrs. Saville at the Towers. Most people were agreed that the late parson had something on his mind. You had only to look at him to see it. And then, was it not queer, his having asked for the 100th Psalm when he lay dying, that he should begin to mutter, as in a rage, when it was recited. The words stirred him, like one who had a sin on his memory. On the other hand, there were some of the Farehamites who sneered at those who preferred a cock and bull story to a plain straightforward one, and who openly declared the cramped up look of a page or two in the registry was all in the clerk's eye ; no registry would bring back the Lathebys to the Towers now. And as for the 100th Psalm, 'twas in the parson's brain as he lay a-dying. It was most like a favourite tune of his, and that was all. Notwithstanding this diversity of opinion,

it was an exhilarating problem to discuss the chances of matters turning out as some folks expected they might, and Mrs. Saville having to leave the Towers, although she had paid bagfulls of money for them, because she had bought them from Sir Peter, who had no right to sell them.

There was one person in the village, everybody said, who could tell, if she wished, something about the time before Sir Montagu openly brought his lady home. That person was Barbara Liston, the daughter of an old and trusted servant of Sir Montagu's wife. But Barbara was as stupid as an owl when questioned about that period ; although she was as sharp as a needle about everything else. Barbara was the most fortunate tenant on the estate. She paid only a nominal rent for her farm, and the impression that she knew what she would not tell was strengthened, too, when

it was understood that one of the special conditions Sir Peter made in the sale of the property to the Savilles was that Barbara's long lease should be secured to her. Her garden grew the finest hollyhocks and vegetables, the primest butter came from her dairy, and her hives were a picture. Yet the farm was as good as a freehold to her. She was a spare woman with a wrinkled throat, and cold grey eyes, that peered knowingly when her interest was touched. Two locks of shaggy white hair showed themselves beneath her close-fitting cap. Barbara was a stingy old egotist, devotedly attached to herself; but there was no indolence about her. She was up betimes domineering over her little maid of fourteen, and the boy who hoed the garden and kept the cows. From dawn to dark the clack of her pattens, and of her tongue, and the click of her knitting-needles, might be heard all

over the place. As for scandal! she could tell a stinging story when she liked. But when asked about Sir Montagu and his wife, Barbara turned stone-deaf whenever an allusion was made to the family question. No amount of adulation on the excellence of her cheeses and the management of her farm, could lessen her infirmity, or her condition of chronic secrecy. This unfathomable state, added to the air of importance the old woman gave herself, as she strutted about the farm, for which she paid next to nothing, played upon Fareham imagination, and perhaps, more than anything else, kept alive the impression, that there was some secret connected with the inheritance of the Towers. Barbara's exact age was a matter of conjecture. She was touchy on the subject; she could not be less than seventy-five;—everybody knew she was years older than Sir Peter—but she boldly deducted

twenty years from the sum. She was wrinkled and bloodless as parchment, but she never ailed. It was a fact that she had outlived her rheumatism. She was embalmed in her secret !

Mr. Latheby, Sir Peter's nephew, ten or twelve years ago, when he first came from Canada, where he was born and married, before going to Paris to pay court to his uncle, had visited Fareham. He had tried to sound Barbara, but she had treated him with the same imperturbable deafness and stupidity.

It took some time for Fareham, after the transfer of the property to the Savilles, to relapse into its normal state of stagnant content. About three years after the sale of the Towers, the news reached the village that Sir Peter was dead, and that he had left the Dower House, some old family pictures and plate, and a thousand pounds,

to his nephew. Somebody wickedly hinted that the old man had enjoyed the idea of leaving the Dower House, which commanded a splendid view of the Towers, to the nephew, who ought to have been heir of the place. There soon set in, after this, a ferment of interest and expectation. Fareham woke up from its habitual trance, as town upholsterers and carpenters were seen upon the road, wending their way to the Dower House. A gardener was sent in to dig up the plots and trim the shrubs. An elderly maid-servant soon after arrived to superintend the arrangements.

Many were the inquirers morning and evening, and the information given was frank and full.

Mr. Latheby, who was a widower now, and his children, were coming to take possession, and might be expected the following week.

CHAPTER II.

“ O blessed vision ! happy child !
Thou art so exquisitely wild.
I think of thee with many fears,
For what may be thy lot in future years.”

Wordsworth.

MR. SAVILLE, the brewer and millionaire, whose daughter had bought the Towers, had begun life on the lowest rung of the social ladder.. His earliest recollections were of chasing birds from new-sown fields, then of having walked barefoot to an adjoining manufacturing town ; there the red-haired, dull-eyed boy, by his expression of saturnine stupidity, and a grotesque suggestion of being always on the crouch for a spring, attracted the attention of a hop-broker, who employed him as his errand-boy. From this he had steadily climbed step by step, never losing

his footing. He displayed marvellous sagacity, founded upon steadily-acquired knowledge, and won his employer's confidence. Observant and prompt in action, his life in the fields had taught him to read off harvest prospects on the face of sky and earth, and he launched into speculations in corn. In those days of sliding-scales he played with scarcity and war-vicissitudes as with two tame panthers who sportively rolled the ball of fortune to his feet.

After amassing great wealth Mr. Saville married a lady of some pretension to birth. He would fain have founded a dynasty, and passed his name down to posterity as the root of a fruitful genealogical tree. Two daughters only came of this marriage, and Mrs. Saville, persisting to live, gave her husband no opportunity of taking to himself another wife less fallible in achieving the purpose for which she had been chosen.

Thwarted in his hopes of having a son, Mr. Saville vowed nevertheless that his name should not be as one written on the sand, to be blurred and blotted out by the feet of a few passing years. He had a grandson by his second daughter, married to Mr. Raikes, a Liverpool merchant. One day Mr. Saville informed his elder daughter Augusta that she must marry her first cousin Charles Saville. Augusta, with quiet impassibility, received the paternal decree. She was then a girl of twenty-two, with a delicate firm outline of features that seemed in their young paleness to be carved out of the transparent white pebbles found on Fareham beach. Mr. Saville knew that his daughter had set her affections on a comely young officer that had lately been their guest—so he refrained from directly pressing his project—but went quietly to work in his own fashion. He pondered over the problem as he would over

any ordinary business transaction, and his mode of procedure was palpable and no less crushing than the familiar cruelty of paternal autocrats. He met the advances of the young man with stinging ridicule which withered all hopes. To her he was dry and kind and watchful in his opposition. She saw and felt a barrier, strong as adamant, yet vague as clouds, which she could by no means surmount. Private lectures or threats there were none; he ridiculed aloud the whole affair. The delicate germ of love that would have flourished within stone walls, and bloomed on bread and water, shrivelled up under this derision. A pathetic farewell was not even possible between the lovers. Strangers countenanced by the father mocked good-humouredly in their presence at the whole affair. All the sanctity of a 'love-secret ended in evaporation. They had been caught and tangled in coils

they could not understand nor unravel, and the young man left the country loveless yet regretful. She remained wounded, resentful, and very quiet, but she never forgave. After her lover's departure she just grew a shade paler, and calmly notified to her father that any time he might fix she was ready to wed her cousin. She gave no further sign of pain than to grow more reticent in manner.

A year after the marriage the brewer's star was auspicious, for an heir bearing the name of Saville was born. There were rejoicings on a scale that gave the measure of the importance the old man attached to this consummation of his hopes. In due course of time another child was born, a member of the inferior sex, whose birth caused no commotion. Before four years had passed, however, Fate checkmated the bold speculator. He was foiled by the ordinary and commonplace means that spares not

the greatest conqueror. Death took the heir away. Soon after, railing at Providence's partiality for the feminine element in the Saville stock, the old man departed a life undone by the superfluity of women in it.

The marriage of Augusta Saville and her cousin proved an unhappy one. He was weak in character, loved horses, and had a taste for music, and was gifted with a voice of rare pathos. She was cold and unsympathetic. After her marriage it was remarked that she developed a strange likeness to her father. When she bought the Towers, she managed the property to the admiration of her steward, who could liken her head only to the inside of a ledger, everything put down, and totted up, and balanced, and nothing forgotten. The rayless clearness of her eyes seemed to be always noting and recollecting, The squire chafed against my lady's yoke of calm disdain. Needless to

dwell on the story of this luckless marriage. The wretched little quarrels, the repulsive little details, the cold word wakening the gust of passion, and the gust of passion ending in the cold word. The petty revenges, the rotten reconciliations—all the vulgarity of a heartless home ; and yet this man, under another conjugal sky, might have been chivalrous and lovable. There was a tender side to his character that was always remembered by the one surviving child of this ill-starred union. How her father used to carry her up to his dressing-room, and sing to her his old French songs. How, when his wife's eagle eye was off him, he would play with her, and make her mysterious presents. The sin of having married for money brought heavier consequences to the man than he could bear. His home became intolerable to him, with one figure alone that could lure him to it,

the grey-eyed elfin figure of his “little maid.”

He turned out badly, infinitely less interesting to the world’s eye than his wife. They called him a prodigal, even a profligate. But oh! the rich soft tones of his voice to the child’s ear. Oh! the dear companionship in those plays. Oh! the delight and gratitude awakened by those mysterious presents. The squire’s absences from home became more frequent and more prolonged, his ways more reckless. At last, when the news reached Fareham that he was killed, having broken his neck riding a steeplechase down in Wales, the village said it was only what it had expected all along. Great curiosity was evinced to catch the first glimpse of the widow. None of the servants, it was reported, had seen her shed a tear. When Fareham saw Mrs. Saville, it saw her unaltered except for a deeper pale-

ness, a certain indefinable expression, as of one removed still further from the common sympathies of life.

Clara Saville was seven when her father died. Nurse O'Leary, an affectionate creature of benighted ignorance, who came from the depths of the County Donegal, and who had implicit faith in the "wee people," vowed the child was a changeling, there was so much of the imp in her. Vivacity and cunning, an inborn love of mischief, a susceptibility to the influences of temperament and moods about her, united to a stubbornness of purpose that never vacillated, made the child an enigma to the household, and a source of continual wailing to the old nurse. But there was a brilliancy and piquancy in all the little one's ways, that made her the bright bit of colour and life amid her chill surroundings.

She was tricksy, with a most mischievous

tendency to hide what was being sought for. Thus, on one occasion, as Clara remembered all her life after, when she was about eight years old, catching sight of a bunch of keys which her mother was seeking for high and low, she had been impelled, by an inexplicable but not to be resisted impulse, to slip them into her pocket, and going quietly out, throw them into the pond at the back of the house. She had also a magpie's hoarding instincts, and liked accumulating toys rather than playing with them. For all her mischief and hoarding, the child was generous. When Nurse O'Leary was moaning the fate of her best silk apron, spoilt by the spilling of some gravy on it, Clara earnestly pressed upon her a small velvet pelisse, the best she had, to make up the deficiency in her wardrobe.

Her determination of purpose evinced itself early in sundry ways. To combat it

would have required "to have eyes," as O'Leary complained, "blinking all round;" and as for her stubbornness, it could only be described as making it no more use saying "no" to her, than "to whistle to the wind to blow one way, when it set itself to blow the other." This stubbornness was accompanied by a daring and restlessness that made the child ignore all difficulties in the way of her purpose. Thus, one morning driving through the village with her mother, Clara's keen eye for colour was attracted by a brilliant striped scarf that a pedlar had drawn out of his pack, and was exhibiting to the best advantage to a group assembled in front of the "Hare and Hounds" tavern. Mrs. Saville refused to stop the carriage and drive a bargain for the scarf. On her return home, Clara sped rapidly up to her room, and taking from a drawer a pair of small enamelled ear-rings, knotted them for greater

safety in a corner of her handkerchief, which she put into her pocket. She then went down to take her music lesson. She gave no outward sign of inattention, but as soon as the lesson was over, she made her way with furtive speed to the further end of the grounds, where only a hedge divided them from the outlying fields. From thence she gained the high road. There trailing in the dust her hat, that she had been obliged to take off the better to force her way through the hedge, she set off at headlong speed. When she reached the "Hare and Hounds," a group was still lingering in front of the tavern, but the pedlar was nowhere visible. Had he left, or was he drinking inside? Mindless of the nudging of elbows and side-long words that greeted her appearance, Clara at once accosted one of the group, and asked if the strange man with the sack was gone. The pedlar had not yet set off on his

travels, but was enjoying a glass of spirits within. He at once stepped out at the news of another customer. The sight of the man re-assuring her, Clara put on her hat, and with some dignity invited him to walk a few steps aside with her, as she wished to speak to him.

By this time all the inmates of the tavern had stepped outside the porch ; a condiment of small boys and untidy women swelled the group, presided over by the landlord of the "Hare and Hounds," who felt it incumbent upon him to keep a sharp look-out at the dealings of one of his customers with the heiress of the Towers. It was a queer sight enough to watch the flushed, eager-eyed little maid with excited gesticulations chaffering and gossiping with the pedlar. Clara found some difficulty in making clear what she wanted, and her mode of payment, to a man whose language she could not

make out, but who kept nodding his head, grinning from ear to ear, and evidently struggling against a tendency to rock from heel to toe. After a while, by his smiles and becks, she understood that the scarf was safe in the pack, and by the stretching out of his hand that he would take the ear-rings in exchange for it. Clara refused, however, by an energetic shake of her head to give up the ear-rings until the scarf was in her grasp. By the time the sack was unpacked, the audience had grown more familiar, and gathered close to the exchanging parties. When the coveted scarf appeared, Clara laid hold of it without further parley, deposited the gleaming ornaments in the pedlar's palm, and set off running homeward, returning through the hedge, and depositing her parcel, for greater precaution, in the well-known hollow of an ivy-covered tree. As she had counted upon,

her absence had not been remarked ; her mother was shut up with the steward, and Nurse O'Leary had something else to do than look after her, now the child was getting on to nine. A few evenings after, on the occasion of a dinner-party at the Towers, Clara boldly fastened the scarf round her waist. Her mother did not recognize the brilliant ware her daughter had coveted from the pedlar's sack, and Nurse O'Leary had to be satisfied with Clara's evasive but peremptory reply that it came out of her box ; and the good woman's dread of getting the child punished more than was good for her, kept her from attracting Mrs. Saville's attention to it. The contents of that box where she kept her father's presents had never been seen by mortal eye. The key of it never left her night or day. There were Clara's Treasures. There were her Secrets. (Except by the feeble

resource of capital letters the importance of these two magic words could not be represented.) Every one of them was a symbol of darling reminiscences. O'Leary had once a glimpse of them, but missy, catching her peeping over her shoulder, stamped and scolded as if possessed by an infant demon. The sanctity of her memories was violated by an indifferent eye prying into the shrine.

From some people Clara recoiled as from toads, and she took no pains to conceal her feelings. From some teachers she would not learn ; with more justice it might be said she could not ; for, with her, physical attraction and repulsion amounted to a fierce instinct beyond control. But she loved well and loyally, and she was jealous in her loves. Once she was really in love, and her singing-mistress was the object of her worship. She practised with untiring zeal to win a smile ; she was shy and eager,

dressing her best to be pleasant to her teacher's eyes ; laying modestly on the piano the flowers she had gathered for her. When Clara heard the tidings of this lady's approaching marriage she was miserable for weeks, during which life was a blank to her.

Between the mother and child there was a smouldering antagonism. Mrs. Saville spared no money on her daughter's education. All her needs were amply provided for ; but as O'Leary said—"Sure, and it's not the teachers nor the fine dresses the children want ; it's the fuss the mothers make over them the little craythurs luk for." Now this fuss Mrs. Saville had never made over Clara. Perhaps the child missed something in her life. Perhaps she always remembered one evening when her poor, battered father, opening his door, found crouched up against it his "little maid," listening to his singing inside. He had

drawn the child in, and wept (not as she saw) in a rather maudlin way over her, whispering incoherent words of his wife ; vowing she had no more heart than a stone, and an adder had more ear than she for music. Clara felt confusedly, yet not less strongly, towards her mother, as though she and her father were creditors, whose accounts were unpaid, although the debtor had wealth and to spare to pay.

It was a peculiarity of this impressionable little soul, that she was powerfully, albeit unconsciously, affected by nature. She did not like the sight of the moorland, stretching out in billowy desolation to the sea. It frightened her, as with a sense of her own wider desolation. The moaning of the waves under the full moon sometimes made her cry. But when the ample sunlight lay upon the tranquil woods, she was blithe and calm ; and this not from

a poetic temperament, but just as a young bird might feel.

Next to her treasures, Clara held dear her blind bullfinch, acquired under characteristic circumstances. Between lesson hours, in every permissible weather, it was the child's custom to ensconce herself with a story-book in the branches of a tree. A Tree! Ah! It was the tree of trees, associated with all her youth. It was a yew, perhaps two hundred years old, easy to climb, and mystical as a fairy tale. There were hollows, filled in winter with little wells of quicksilver. It had the gout badly, giant knots; but it was ever green—its little spiny leaves all one green reverie. What sounds peopled that tree! What sudden flights of birds and bees went through it. It could wail and moan, burst into laughter, and dream, murmuring half-aloud to itself; and when the wind blew, it gave forth a

cadence sonorous and infinite, like that of the sea. There was a natural seat in this tree, and a bough to lay a book on ; and a bough to lovingly support the weary back ; and boughs to hide even a glimpse of the little white frock. This tree stood at the farthest end of the ground, overlooking the fields. One sunshiny day, Clara was up in her tree, following Aladdin in the resplendent cave, and ordering about the faithful, all-powerful genie of the lamp, when a shrill, tremulous piping, as of something weak in pain, brought her back from story-land to the consciousness of branches overhead and fields below. It was a bird's cry. She listened, and heard two ragged boys disputing just outside the hedge on the most amusing sort of torture to inflict on a bull-finck in their possession.

Clara slipped down her tree in a moment, and thrust her head through the hedge.

"You cowards, to hurt that bird," she cried.

The boys, who had started at the interruption, seeing it was only a girl who addressed them, asserted their right to kill the bird if they chose.

At this, Clara thrust her whole body through the hedge.

"I'll give you a shilling—it's a new one—it was struck this year," she said, putting her hand in her pocket, and in her eagerness to pull out the shilling, drawing the other contents with it: a string of beads, a spiral shell, a penny with a hole in it, a slate pencil, a small silver fruit-knife fell to the ground. The knife was one of her choicest possessions. It was the only one of her father's gifts she ever took out, occasionally allowing herself to use it to peel fruit, in one of her secret expeditions to the kitchen-garden.

The lads made a grab at the knife.

"I can't give you the knife," cried Clara, hastily picking it up, and slipping it back into her pocket. Then proceeding in a voice of diplomatic softness, that gradually grew crescendo : "It would be of no use to you. But here's the shilling. It was given to me the other day, because it was struck this year, and you may have the shell and the penny with a hole in it for luck. That's quite enough--no one would give anything for the bird now—for you've blinded him."

"Then we'll wring his neck," cried the boy, holding the bullfinch up by the leg.

"Stop, you monsters, you wicked cruel beasts. Take my knife ; give me the bird this minute," screamed Clara, flinging her treasures down at their feet.

The boys handed her the bullfinch, picked up all they found, and quickly decamped.

Then Clara folded up the bullfinch in the skirt of her dress, and set out in quest of

O'Leary. Already she felt for it the tenderness born of sacrifice. Every cry of the mangled bird caused her a little shiver. When she found Nurse, she repeated the circumstances under which she had got it, seasoning her narrative with tremendous epithets of scorn and hatred of the boys. To her pressing and repeated questions if he would get well, O'Leary only shook her head, saying, "Eh ! dear heart, he'll never get his sight again."

"But I'll take *such* care of him ; his cage will be better than a tree. I do not think I should so much mind being blind. I shouldn't see so many ugly people," said Clara, shutting her eyes to try the effect of total darkness on herself.

"Dearest heart," said nurse, with a soft shaking laughter through her fat body. "I doubt ye'd be blithe long without your winsome eyes, and that ye'd not long for

the sight of an ugly face more than ye do now for the flowers."

"He must get well," said Clara, "but, you know, it's a secret. You'll not tell mamma. You'll keep him in your room during the day, and at night he'll sleep under my bed. It's a secret, you know," she repeated, with her accustomed little nod of command.

Only one other person did Clara take into her confidence about Bully, Peter, her father's old coachman, and her own devoted slave. It was to Peter, Bully ultimately owed his recovery, for he would have inevitably succumbed to the zeal of O'Leary by day and Clara by night. After some weeks, Bully not only recovered his health but his spirits ; he began by making plunges about his cage, and soon developed a fine instinct for finding the food Clara carefully provided him with.

Soon the low-toned, plaintive notes of his little throat made themselves heard, and Peter proposed to teach him to whistle a tune. But Clara rejected the proposal. He was *her* bird, and she would teach him herself. Every day, at various times, whenever she could snatch the opportunity, she locked herself up in her room with Bully, and gently crooned to him a quaint pathetic old French song her father used to sing to her. Since his death she had never sung it to any one, only to herself, sitting up in her tree, after having made sure no one was by—

“J'ai encore i tel pasté,
Qui n'est mie de lasté,
Que nous mangerons, Marote
Bec à bec, et moi et vous—
Chi me r'atendés Marote
Chi venrai parler à vous—”

The lesson was fruitless of effect upon Bully for a long while, although he listened, with head well poised on one side, as if

standing on the nest's edge, hearkening to the song of another bird in the boughs. At last he began making some blundering attempts; then suddenly, one day, he burst into song, whistling the melody in a pipe of wood-land freshness.

Every one in the house knew of Bully's existence by this time except Mrs. Saville. She could tell to a farthing the daily expenditure of her household, but she was as ignorant of the thousand little joys and sorrows crowding around her as a factory-chimney is of the swallows sheltering under the eaves. She had heard the occasional piping of a bullfinch, but she had taken no notice of it, ascribing the bird to some servant's foolish waste of wages. One day, however, there thrilled forth a melody that made Mrs. Saville pause in her occupation. It was so distant she heard it but vaguely, yet her heart stood still as if a ghost were in the

house. She went to the door, then a few steps up the stairs, closer still, until distinctly she heard the old air her husband used for ever to be singing and humming to himself. Mrs. Saville rung the bell sharply and asked whose bird was singing; when she heard it was Clara's, she flushed red and trembled. She ordered the bullfinch to be at once removed from the house.

A terrible scene ensued between the child and the servant. On hearing what her mother's commands were, Clara placed herself before the cage, and snatching up an ivory paper-knife struck out with it, crying that she would kill any one who dared touch her bird. Her mother now came in and a parley ensued. Clara, panting and quivering, held the cage in her embracing arms, warily watching every movement about her. Persistently, inch by inch, she fought her way to having her will. From the first Mrs.

Saville was at a disadvantage, being strongly agitated, like one under the disturbing sway of memories. Clara agreed that Bully should be removed out of hearing. She begged, implored, stormed, and at last obtained for him the grant of an attic at the top of the Towers, the key to be given to her and the promise that no one should enter the room in her absence.

All these conditions having been subscribed to, Clara personally superintended the removal of the lumber that had accumulated in the attic. She watched the house-maid scrubbing and dusting it. Then she carried up some flower-pots, and the picture of a horse that had belonged to her father. When all was ready and the room looked bright and pretty, the black trunk containing her treasures was carried up, she following with Bully's cage.

The key of the attic was placed in the

ring, with the key of her trunk, and never left her pocket or the place under her pillow. No one was allowed to enter but O'Leary and Peter.

CHAPTER III.

“ When the worst recorded change
Was of apple dropt from bough;
When love’s sorrows seemed more strange
Than love’s treason can seem now.”

E. B. Browning.

AN event of unprecedented importance to Clara happened soon after this ; one also that exhibited Mrs. Saville in a new light to her household.

Her younger sister, Mrs. Raikes, who had married before her, died. Calamities of various kinds had of late years crowded into this lady’s path. Money failures, almost amounting to ruin, followed by her husband’s death, left her shattered in health. Mrs. Saville had frequently invited her to the Towers, but the doctors ordered a milder climate, and now death overtook her on her

way to the south. In a pathetic letter, she left her only child, a boy five years older than Clara, to her sister Augusta's care.

Mrs. Saville ordered the room behind the dining-room, that her husband used to call his den, to be fitted up for the lad's study. On the news of the master's death, his widow had commanded that all traces of his life in it should be removed. His guns, his pipes, his whips, his pictures of favourite hunters, his guitar. Since that day of clearance the room had not been opened. When Mrs. Saville entered it once more she winced a little. Empty for years, yet it was full to the brim of the life of its last occupant. Thick as the cobwebs, ghosts, and echoes of old schemes—songs, bursts of passion, peals of laughter, nestled and lingered in every nook and corner. She turned a shade paler, sat down for a minute on a chair that the servants had brought in,



but resolutely went on with her task. The room under her direction became just what a lad would like his special domain to be. It assumed an aspect of study and sport, agreeably imposing and inviting. Maps and fishing-tackle, book-cases and a gun, a telescope and whips, the head and antlers of a stag over the door, and a desk on the table. The servants said among themselves, that it was like preparing for the heir's coming. As Mrs. Saville planned for her nephew's comfort, the queer likeness to her father came out stronger than ever. The nose seemed to develop a more impressive hook, the sleepy cunning came into the eyes ; there was even the subdued alertness of motion that suggested the animal crouching for a spring.

Clara had once seen her cousin. She remembered her mother crying over him ; the only time she had seen her mother weep ; and she had heard that her mother had said

that her nephew was the image of the little son she had lost—the one being she seemed ever to have loved—whose miniature always stood on her table near her Prayer Book.

Clara did not feel one scrap of jealousy of the importance attached to Fred's arrival. She hated boys since the day she had rescued the bullfinch from the clutches of two of the genus. Yet she was not averse from having a younger inmate at the Towers. Even a cat-and-dog existence might prove to have stirring charms preferable to the monotony of hers.

On the morning of his arrival she said to O'Leary, after some preliminary rocking backwards and forwards on her chair—a motion favourable to meditation : “ I suppose I shall have to call him Frederick, and shake hands with him.”

“ Dear, and I should kiss him,” replied the good old soul, “ seeing he's as yer brother,

being yer mother's own sister's son, who died of consumption and a broken heart, poor thing. An' sure he'll be yer sweetheart some day, but that'll be many and many a year to come, so I'd not grudge him a kiss now, when he's not many left him in the world to kiss."

"I shall not kiss him," said Clara, with immense emphasis. "I shall never have a sweetheart ; I hate boys."

In the afternoon Mrs. Saville set out to meet her nephew. Clara was left behind at her lessons. Towards evening her mother and Fred might be expected home. As the hour drew on Clara walked about the carriage-drive restlessly. She was restless, not from any stress of anticipation, but vaguely, because a new chapter was beginning in her life. It was an evening set in the very heart of June, fulfilling all the promises of beauty nature endowed it with.

light lay like melted gold over the flowers and the grasshopper-haunted grass. She hummed her little French song to herself. She felt pleasantly excited. One object, however, jarred upon her—the outline of an old deserted mill, raising itself up against the sky. It seemed to exercise an uncanny influence upon her. When she turned away, she felt impelled to look round at it again, till it filled all her mental vision, and grew there to be the shrouded ghost of something that was going to happen—something advancing with outstretched arms to grasp her. The idea that she was going to be miserable seized Clara, and passing from expectation to fear she ran in-doors with an angry choking in her throat, and a thud at her heart.

When the carriage drew up, Clara's efforts to catch a glimpse of her cousin from an upper window effectually dispelled the

unaccountable terror that had possessed her. She had a fine bird's-eye view of a crushed wide-awake hat and a rim of fair hair. A few moments after her mother came in to bid her go and entertain her cousin, as she was about to lie down till supper-time.

Clara went to the mirror, smoothed her brown hair carefully, brushed it high in a crown, under which her grey eyes gleamed, and her rosy cheeks glowed flower-like. She was sorry she could not put on a bright-coloured sash, but she made as compensatingly elaborate a knot as the length of the black ribbon would allow, over her white dress; and fastened a red rose in her girdle. When these details were complete, Sir Joshua Reynolds might have been tempted to pourtray the little maid in her vivid hues and graceful outlines, coquettish and innocent.

Clara next took up her post of observation

over the bannisters. She watched her cousin going out of his room, and into the small drawing-room called the porcelain-room. She waited till she calculated that Fred had had time to survey the room and was sitting down. Nothing must divert his attention from herself. She then descended and made her entrance. She was accustomed to receive guests in her mother's absence. A child in the nursery, she was a perfect little lady in the drawing-room. She would seat herself with an air of utmost consequence in an arm-chair, and open conversation with extreme gravity. Her cousin was sitting near the window.

"How do you do? I know you. You are Mr. Frederick Raikes. I am Miss Clara Saville," she said with a curtsy; then with some importance she took a seat at some distance from him. She had solved the difficulty of greeting by determining

not to shake hands, as any approach might lead him to expect a kiss.

She looked at the lad from head to foot. He had risen when she entered, and now sat down again, appearing tremendously ill at ease. Clara thought that, as well as she could see, he was rather a nice-looking boy ; rather small and thin, and with very pale yellow hair. She felt touched at the sight of his deep mourning and forlorn attitude. It was a pity he had such awkward legs and arms, and sat so uncomfortably.

“Would you like a bigger chair ?” she asked. “There’s an arm-chair by your side.”

“No, thank you, I’m all right,” said Fred, giving a shove of his feet forward.

“I’m afraid you’re very tired. France is a long way off ; you have to cross the sea to come from it,” Clara resumed, not loth to display her geographical knowledge and hospitality together.

"I did not make the whole journey to-day. No one could come from Avignon to Fareham in one day," answered her cousin, with something that sounded like the wakening of laughter in his voice.

"I know that very well," said Clara sharply.

Then, after a pause, she began with dignity: "Which country do you prefer, England or France?"

"I like England. It's a jolly old place. That is, it was when mother and the governor were alive." Here his voice sank and faltered.

Clara felt very sorry for him. She felt inclined to get up and shake hands with him, but this would be too great a compromise of dignity, so she revolved in her mind some consolatory topics of conversation, and began to tell him of the horse he was to have; roan, with a white fetlock, and

promised him also to let him play with her pug. Soon Fred assumed a more comfortable position in his chair.

“And—perhaps,—” said Clara, in a tone of immense condescension, “some day—I may show you my bullfinch.”

“I don’t care for caged birds; there’s no more pleasure looking at them than at gold fishes in a bowl you mustn’t fish for,” replied Fred, indifferently.

“But my bullfinch whistles the tune of a French song. He almost says the words. Although he’s blind he knows his way about as though he had eyes—and sometimes I let him out of his cage, and he hops about the room.”

“How did he get blind?” asked Fred.

Then Clara told the story, quivering with indignation at the remembrance.

“They *were* brutes,” assented Fred, with an emphasis that won Clara’s heart com-

pletely, and made her almost wish that she had given him a kiss.

"They were. I hate"—she began eagerly, but she checked herself, remembering Fred was a boy, and showed signs of being an exception to the species.

From that hour the talk went on smoothly till half-past eight, when the bell rang announcing supper. Then Mrs. Saville made her appearance, saying it was time for Clara to go to bed. Clara retired with some indignation. The next day, however, she had a holiday, to make her cousin's acquaintance, and for some days she played the part of hostess with great satisfaction to herself. She always began by being stately, and distant, and very worldly. She spouted out stories about the pictures, showed the curiosities of the house, pointed out the ruins of the old monastery with the air of a small cicerone; then with some turn in the conver-

sation, fresh and foolish all the child nature would break out as sudden and unexpected as a nursery rhyme in a catalogue of antiquities. That wonder-castle, Latheby Towers, what a romantic interest the makers and founders of it excited in Clara's mind ! The legends and chronicles of the place were her fairy lore. She loved the hero, Sir Basil, who was killed in fight, and sometimes in half-dreamy hours she fancied herself walking with him in the woods. She knew all about the studious Sir Charles, who had planted the terraced gardens, and loved to read under the shadow of the white beeches. And there was the mysterious fate of the handsome Sir Edward. Clara enjoyed her *rôle* of historian, and was taking quite a fancy to her cousin. She thought, with a certain self-conscious superiority, that he took a long time to dress, and was too fond of brushing his hair and his coat ; but he looked

very sprue in his black suit, and then—he was a boy. Every morning on awaking she felt a little excited, remembering Fred was down-stairs. But as the days went on, and Fred felt more at home, Clara could not conceal from herself that she was losing her influence over him. If he was cleaning his gun or preparing his fishing-tackle he did not look up at her approach, and answered vaguely when she addressed him. They had even quarrelled about the yew tree, when Fred declared it was as easy to get inside its branches as into a bath-chair. How was she to win him back, how charm him, that he would be her humble slave? She had not yet shown him Bully. She would show him Bully now; and she would let him look at her Treasures; she would let him see her Secrets. The importance of this resolve and the results that would ensue, kept her awake for nearly an hour. She watched her oppor-

tunity. She chose the moment when Fred was giving Yap his daily lesson, how to stand upon his hind legs, drop his fore paws, hold a biscuit on his nose—then on a signal snap and devour. Fred seemed sociably disposed. He was proud of displaying his influence over Yap, who before his coming was an uncivilized dog.

Clara began mysteriously. "Fred, you've seen everything except one thing; should you like to see it?"

"What is it?" asked Fred, not relaxing a muscle, forefinger up, looking down severely on Yap.

"It's something no one has seen but myself," said Clara slowly.

"Is it the secret passage?" cried Fred, who was convinced the place was mysteriously mined. In his eagerness he turned towards Clara, and Yap, seizing the golden opportunity, feebly barked thanksgiving

for ended penance, and gulped down his morsel.

"No; it's something at the top of the house. Will you come up?"

"All right; show us the way," cried Fred.

Clara walked in front, enjoying the sense of her recovered dignity. They climbed the winding stairs leading to the attics. She then took out her bundle of keys, and applying the largest to the oak door, opened it. Fred saw a panelled room, some prints hung up, some flowers in the window, a cage placed right in the sunshine. There was very little furniture in the room but a black trunk in the centre.

"Halloo! is that Bully?" said the lad, going up to the window, and beginning to whistle.

This was a favourable prelude. Clara let him whistle to Bully, who listened with

his head well poised on one side, and began to pipe in answer.

"He's a jolly little chap. I'll teach him heaps of tunes ; now what have you got to show me ?" said Fred.

Then Clara, after a little lingering and a look of speechless importance, opened the box—lifted the lid. Her Secrets, her Treasures were disclosed ! A pair of spangles ; a bunch of feathers ; a lock of her paternal grandmother's hair, in a light yellow silk bag ; an old-fashioned fan of sandal-wood ; a scent-bottle without a stopper ; a pair of castanets ; a copy of '*Pilgrim's Progress*' with old-fashioned illustrations—Christian in a pig-tail, and Great-heart with legs far too weak for a pilgrimage ; a box, studded with blue and amber beads ; '*Watts's Hymns* ;' a torn roll of music, with the portrait of a comic singer on the cover in the zeal of performance ; a small whip, with a turquoise-studded

handle ; a pen, the handle made of a fox's paw ; a worn smoking-cap.

These last two items Clara had stolen from the room down-stairs, on the day the servants were clearing out the odds and ends the Squire would never need again.

"What a droll heap of things!" said Fred, looking down at them. "That's a pretty little whip. What do you keep them all locked up for?"

His indifference was at first a matter of astonishment to her. As he went on taking up one thing after another, without any show of interest, she was petrified. When Fred, after blowing through a whistle found it would give out no sound, threw it down, saying "it was a crazy old thing," indignation seized Clara's heart. She was restrained by the reflection that she was getting on to nine years of age. At last she said low, "It was papa gave me these things. That is

why they are so dear to me, and that I keep them together up-stairs."

"Well," exclaimed Fred, "he had uncommonly odd tastes ; it's the queerest mixture I ever saw. It's more like a rag and bone shop than anything. He must have been a rum old cove."

A tornado of passion swept over Clara. She stood before Fred, trembling from head to foot, her cheeks blanched, her eyes dilated.

"How dare you laugh at my father and call him names? You would not dare to do it if he were alive ; but he's dead, so you don't care. If I were a man I'd fight you. You're a sneak ! Go out," she said, pointing to the door, and Fred almost abashed obeyed. Then, shutting her box with a bang, Clara dashed out and sought her room, where she lay on the floor in a storm of sobs. This was all she had gained by revealing her Treasures. Her Secrets were profaned. Her

father reviled, his presents turned into ridicule—*by a boy*. After the first blind gust of passion had spent itself, Clara sat up determined to revenge herself and her father. As long as she could keep awake that night, she turned the matter over in her head. By morning her plan of action was resolved upon. Her first care must be to extract from Fred the pledge that he would never reveal that he had seen her Secrets. She accosted him in the morning, and was cold and cautious in her approaches. Fred was distant also; he had not forgotten that Clara had called him a sneak, so he began to whistle with a show of vast unconcern.

“A gentleman always keeps his word when he gives it. Would you keep yours?” said Clara, standing very straight before him.

“Yankee doodle went to town,
Upon a Kentish pony,”

whistled Fred a little louder.

"If I ask you particularly to give me a promise, will you give it?" said Clara.

"I don't know," replied Fred, still whistling.

"If it's about something that is of no concern to you, but of great concern to me, will you give it?" persisted Clara.

"I don't know. What is it?" said Fred hammering down a nail, and absorbed in his work.

"I want you never, *never*, to tell anybody you've seen what is in my trunk up-stairs," said Clara, a light leaping into her eyes.

"Oh! the rag and bone shop! I've forgotten already what's inside it," said Fred, laughing very loud.

Clara quivered, and drew herself up in her cotton dress. "Will you swear it?"

"I swear it," said Fred in a sepulchral tone; then, naturally, he said, turning to her, "'Pon my word, I won't tell."

Then Clara went in search of Peter the coachman. Peter was a north countryman, six foot high, gaunt, grim, obstinate as Fate. Nature had made him deaf of the left ear, and he turned this defect to account, for when orders were given he had no mind to obey, he turned his left ear to them. To Clara, the right was always turned. Peter was malleable as putty in her hands. There was one tie between them. In all the world, they were the only two who fondly remembered the man sleeping, after the blunders of his life, in the churchyard down in Wales. Peter had been in the Saville family ever since he was a boy. He had given Clara's father his first riding lesson, and he remembered as yesterday how bravely the little lad had sat his pony, chattering ostentatiously of future exploits all the while. He had served his master through his confident, frivolous, open-handed youth; through his blighted and

dissipated manhood. Now, all he remembered was the innocent lad ; the only trait of character ever vividly before him was the warm-heartedness that had survived the ruin of dissipation.

Peter had transferred all his devotion to Clara, and in return he was pretty well bullied by her. His little mistress was as exacting as an empress. For a long while Peter did her behests with the unquestioning obedience of a huge newfoundland, but as time went on, and Clara's imperative demands became of a more complex nature, incompatible with Peter's notions of duty to horses and other creatures, he devised a means by which, while apparently still acquiescing in his thraldom, he yet efficiently slipped his neck from the noose. With unparalleled canniness, he humoured his despot, agreed with all she said, went further in his assertions than she did, fell

into all her plans, and then went and obeyed, just as much or as little as he liked of the imperial decree.

To Peter went Clara, with her heart thirsting for revenge upon Fred. She found him cleaning some harness, for Peter had supreme contempt for grooms, and did the bulk of the stable work himself. She entered at once upon the subject, without any diplomatic advances.

“Peter, I want you to do something for me.”

“Well, missy, and what is it?” asked Peter, lifting a deeply lined countenance, on which played a peculiar smile of half-amused, half-abject affection.

“It’s something I want you to do more than anything I ever wanted you to do before,” replied Clara. “I’ll give you my silver pencil-case as a reward.”

“Eh, missy, you know I do not want your

silver pencil-case. If it's what I can do, I'll do it for the love of ye," said the old man, with a tender intonation. "But ye're as white as your frock, and your eyes are glowing like a pussy cat's in the dark. What has so hard wrought you, missy dear ?"

"Look here, Peter," said Clara, coming one step nearer ; "if you heard some one you loved called names, and the things he's given you laughed at, and that person was dead, and could not defend himself, what would you do, Peter ?"

"Well, missy," replied Peter, cautiously, after a pause, "I'd have a sore wrastle with myself not to belabour that person with my fists or with my tongue, according to sex and rank."

"In this case, Peter, you must have no wrestle with yourself. You know my presents papa gave me. You've not seen them all yourself, and never altogether. No

one has ever seen them, but I thought Fred might be feeling strange here, and I would show them to him ; and yesterday I brought him up-stairs, and opened my box for him, and he—" here Clara paused, then continued in a deepened tone, " he laughed at them ; he called my trunk a rag and bone shop ; and said my father was a rum old cove."

Peter gave a low whistle, to hide a certain crumpling about the corners of the mouth, but said not a word.

" He ought to be punished," cried Clara, extending her hand.

" That he ought," agreed Peter.

" He ought to be beaten," said Clara, stamping her foot.

" Within an inch of his life," said Peter.

" I hate boys. They have no heart," said Clara, flicking a tear away as if it were a wasp.

" They're so stuffed with conceit, they've

no place for anything else," said Peter, with contemptuous emphasis; "but we'll take the shine out of him, missy dear."

"I think he ought to be rolled in the dust," said Clara.

"We'll duck him in the pond, with the duck-weed," said Peter.

"I think a roll in the dust and a whipping would be enough this time," said Clara, beginning to relent.

"Leave it to me, missy," said Peter, with pleasant assurance in his voice. "I've got to drive him out to-day, and make your mind easy, he'll get what he deserves for his impudence."

Fred, that afternoon, was to go and pay a visit, some miles off, to old friends of his mother's, and Mrs. Saville had ordered Peter to prepare the carriage, and drive him over there. When the hour came, Clara got up a tree by the gate to see the carriage pass.

Fred looked impudently comfortable, lolling back on the cushions. Peter, stern and inscrutable as Fate, sat on the box bolt upright, whip in hand. When they passed the tree, from which Clara's eyes peered like a squirrel's amongst the branches, Fred winked and nodded sideways to her, as a token that as far as he was concerned he was willing amity should again reign between them; but Clara, ignoring this friendly advance, darted a glance at Peter, keen and direct as a watchword, to which Peter responded by gravely touching his hat.

When they returned some hours later they found Clara on guard, walking restlessly up and down, just inside the gate. Fred bore no outward signs of his humiliation. He sprang out with undiminished alacrity at the news that the game-keeper had brought him a ferret.

Clara followed Peter. "Did you punish him?"

"I take it, missy, he'll never vex you again," said Peter.

"But did you roll him in the dusty road?" asked Clara.

"In the dusty road!" repeated Peter, with a deeper burr. "I rolled him in the dust, until I just could see the legs of him kicking like those of a fly in a milk-jug. I gave him not one crack or two cracks of my whip, but twenty, thirty cracks, and between each crack, says I, 'That's for laughing at my master,' or, 'That's for laughing at Miss Clara's treasures.' I did not stop until he cries, 'Hold, hold; I'll never do it again;' and I drove him home quite humble; but he'll ne'er be able to sit or stand with comfort for a month, to say the least," he concluded with a grim smile. Clara wondered that Fred looked so well, but she never

doubted the gospel that fell from old Peter's lips.

"He does not look dusty," she remarked.

"That's because I well brushed him, missy. You mustn't say a word, because if the missus heard it, I would be discharged," Peter replied with a wink.

"No; I won't tell," said Clara, with infinite satisfaction.

During this colloquy, there had been a scene in the back-yard. The ferret had escaped from his temporary cage, and been hunted by Fred and the keeper. On Fred laying hold of him, the frightened beast had bit his hand. When Clara joined her cousin, his appearance showed he had gone through a scuffle. Repentance seized her.

"Oh, Fred, your coat looks very dusty."

"Never mind," said the lad, giving himself a shake.

A little pause—then in lagging accents

Clara said, "I've got seventeen sixpences. They'll help to buy you a new coat ; I'll give them all to you."

"What a little fool you are, Clara ; they'd not buy buttons for my coat," cried Fred, unrolling at the same time the handkerchief he had wound round his bleeding hand.

At sight of the linen with which Fred had staunched his wounds, Clara gave a sob. "Oh Fred ; how hurt you've been."

"Not much. It's the fault of that fool of a man. He's no more notion of his business than a rabbit. I'll ask aunt to turn him off."

"No, Fred ; you must not ; it's I ; it's my fault. It's I *ordered* him to do it."

"You ordered him !" exclaimed Fred, aghast. "What do you mean ?"

"Yes ; I ordered him," said Clara, speaking fast, tears filling her eyes. "I—I showed you the presents papa gave me.

No one had ever seen them before, and you laughed at them. You called papa names—and"—with a vivid and passionate gesture, pressing her hand to her bosom—"it hurt me here, for he's dead—and no one was kind to him when he was living. I would have beaten you if I could" (with a stamp). "I would—but you're bigger than me, and a boy, so I ordered Peter to thrash you, and roll you in the dust."

"Hullo!" said Fred, who had grown a shade paler. "I'm sorry I laughed at your governor, Clara; but Peter did not thrash me. He would not dare to."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Mrs. Saville, coming up, and standing chill and curious before the children. Clara had a look of her father when she was roused. Mrs. Saville turned away from her, to Fred, so like the miniature up-stairs. "How wild you look, Clara; go up and brush your

hair and wash your face. What is it, Fred?"

"It was I was in the wrong, aunt," he answered. "Clara and I had a quarrel, and we were making it up. I was in the wrong, and she was in the right. Shake hands, Clara. I'll never tease you like that again."

By this speech, Fred recovered some of his favour in Clara's eyes. Before going indoors, however, she turned in to see Peter, to reproach him for having humbugged her.

"You should not have told me you thrashed him when you did not; although now, I'm glad of it."

"Eh, missy," said Peter, with imperturbable gravity, brushing down his horse, "do you think he'd tell you I thrashed him? It's not in the lads to let on they've had a thrashing."

Clara was mystified; but had some doubts of Peter ever after.

CHAPTER IV.

" Ce matin, quand le jour a frappé ta paupière,
Quel séraphim pensif, courbé sur ton chevet,
Secouait des lilas dans sa robe légère,
Et te contait tout bas les amours qu'il rêvait ? "

Alfred de Musset.

FRED had been installed just a year at the Towers, when the report reached Fareham that Mr. Latheby and his family were coming to inhabit the Dower House. Clara heard the tidings discussed in the drawing-room. She noticed, the next day, that her mother briefly and sternly dismissed the topic when Fred brought it forward at dinner ; but Nurse O'Leary was ready enough to talk about it, too. At another time, Clara would have been excited at the prospect of meeting the descendants of Sir Basil ; but now her mind was absorbed in

a matter that blotted out all secondary interests. Bully was very ill. He was evidently pining away. A few mornings after, he was found dead at the bottom of his cage. The great ancestors of the Lathebys died, one by one, and no doubt were duly wept and bemoaned. Clara's father died, and there were some sore hearts—one very sore little heart—but the morning her bullfinch died, there was such grief as there had not been since the death of Niobe's daughters.

In the morning there was a solemn burial, between two stretching root-claws of the yew tree. The coffin was the box studded with blue and amber beads, that was taken out of the black trunk for Bully's last use. Clara performed the funeral rites alone. She would not let Fred help her, although he had shown sympathy on the occasion ; but she fancied his care of Bully had

hastened his death. As she was filling the hole again, her chin falling and rising convulsedly with lingering sobs, her mother's voice was heard.

"What in the world is the matter, child; what is all this crying and ado for?"

"Bully's dead," said Clara, mastering in a moment every demonstration of grief.

"Well, and what of that?" said Mrs. Saville, severely. "Nonsense!—you ought to be ashamed to show so little self-control. Wipe your eyes, child, and get to your lessons. Miss Beale will be here in half-an-hour."

Clara did not reply, but she trembled in every limb. All the antagonism in her nature was roused. Her mother was isolating her in her grief. She was glad Bully was dead, because he sang like her father. When her mother turned away, a wild fit of passion seized the child. She finished her

work without shedding another tear; then, taking up her hat, she pushed her way through the hedge, and rushed out into the open fields. She did not know where she was going to, and she did not care; she just ran on, impelled by passionate rebellion against a hard and unpitying world.

It was a fresh May morning; set in a blue mystery of sea and sky; blithe with the notes of birds singing up in the young-leaved trees—with the tramp of lambs frisking in the meadows. No responsibilities of harvest weighed as yet on the fields. The sun shone on the white blossoms of the fruit-trees and hawthorns; on the grass, star-strewn with daisies and anemones. It was a cowslip morning: primroses were in the hedges; the white butterflies flapped their wings over the host of wild flowers encamped in the woods, and the brave king-cups were still filled with dew to the brim.

All this jocund world of glistening lights and transparent shadows, swayed and tripped to a measure piped by the west wind aloft. Through this festival of nature little Clara wandered, a speck of perplexed and grieving humanity. For the first time, as the fat birds warbled or flew past, she said to them, "You'll die some day."

Suddenly she found her wanderings had brought her close under the hill, where the old, deserted mill reared itself up against the sky. She was turning hurriedly away, when voices in an adjoining field attracted her attention. She was divided from it by a hedge—a hedge about which nature had spread a carpet such as has never been fashioned or woven in tapestry. A fabric of fresh moss and deep-bladed grass; of strawberry leaves, sheltering tiny starry blossoms; and over these a trail of blackberry leaves, frosted with dew.

Clara peeped over the hedge. A lad was sitting on a fallen trunk of a tree; a girl, apparently about her own age, was standing before him. She was dressed in grey; a large hat sheltered her face; and she was swinging a small basket in her hand. Both children were looking away from Clara. A big Newfoundland crouched at the feet of the boy, who sat very still.

It was the little girl who was talking when Clara began to listen.

"If you sit here, Cecil," she was saying in a voice whose freshness was weighted with protecting fondness, more motherly than childlike, "I'll run and pick those watercresses we saw. They looked so green. Such big, fresh, green leaves. I want you to have them for your tea."

"Very well; but mind, don't lose your way. I'm not sure Ghost could yet find his way home; and besides, I've forgotten his chain."

"I won't lose my way," said the little girl, with assurance. "I can see from here the entrance of the glen, where the river runs. Oh, Cecil, it is so pretty here! It is so blue and so wide. It is like standing on an island in the sky. There are five—no,—six, seven boats with white sails on the sea. They do not seem to be moving. They look like swans, there. They are just like the enchanted boat, you know, we read of the other day."

"There should only be one then," said the boy.

"And the cowslips! Such a heap of cowslips! I never saw so many in a field before. Are you not glad we have come to Fareham at last?" And the little maid gave a jump of entirely childish delight; at which sign of rejoicing, the Newfoundland wagged his great feather of a tail.

"Yes; I am glad," replied the boy, with deep-voiced content.

Ghost looked after the little girl, as she set off at a run, but he made no offer to follow her. He rather drew closer to his master.

Clara now left her post of observation, and going to the stile, crossed it. The Newfoundland stood up, alert and watchful; ears, nose, tail, quivering a challenge. The boy also turned his face in her direction. What a beautiful face it was—and so calm. At a few paces from him Clara paused, arrested by a qualm of fear. The dark eyes were open, but there seemed no expectancy in them. All at once, a doubt flashed upon her. "Was he blind,—like Bully?"

The possibility acted like an anodyne upon her. That moment the fury left her. She was changed into a dove.

Drawing near timidly, she said softly :

"Good-morning. The little girl who was with you said this was a pretty place. It is our place."

No answer from the boy ; only an uneasy, apparently a suspicious, shifting of his position.

"You've come to see the place," persisted Clara, sitting down and bending forward, trying to catch a full view of his face. "I would ask you to the house to luncheon, only the mistress of it is uncommonly disagreeable."

Again no response ; only a look in her direction—such a glimmerless look. Clara felt a little frightened.

"I know," she resumed gravely, "that a young lady ought to be introduced to a gentleman before speaking to him. I live in the big house yonder. (She pointed to the Towers.) The boy did not turn his eyes in the direction of her finger. He said simply :

"I hope my sister and myself are not trespassers."

"Not at all; this field is open to every one," said Clara, with a gracious nod. Again a pause. She bent forward, nearer and nearer, peering into his face. He did not draw back. He sat there, so still—so still—a stillness contrasting with the stir and flutter around, as if it were the calm of arrested life. At last, Clara whispered: "Are you blind?"

"Yes."

"Can you see nothing?"

"No, nothing—except a glimmer of light."

"I had a bullfinch; he was blind too. He died this morning."

"Dear me! it's too bad a bird should be blind," said the boy, sympathetically.

"Blind!" said Clara, in a tremulous voice. "What is blindness like? Like being always in a dark room?"

"Well, yes ; I suppose that's what it is like. But I was not always blind. I remember."

"You remember ! What do you remember ? Blue, green, yellow ; my favourite colour, pink ?"

"Yes ; I remember them."

"Here's a flower ; what do you think it's like ?" said Clara, holding up a cowslip.

"I can't tell. Let me feel it."

"Smell it," she said, putting it up to his nose.

"It's a cowslip," he answered, taking it out of her hand, and spelling, with swift fingers, the mystery of stalk and petals. "Its flower is a little burst of gold, I know that. It has got a long calyx with pointed leaves. Mary told me they are very pale green, like colour seen by moonlight. A soft down covers them. I feel it when I hold it against the light ; it seems surrounded by a silver nimbus."

"Oh!" said Clara, slowly, "it's like that—is it? I would call it a cowslip, and have done with it, if I were you."

He dropped the flower, and turning to her, said: "And you, are you pretty?"

"I!" answered Clara, taken much aback. A moment's pause, during which she took a mental survey of herself before an invisible mirror. "Yes, oh yes; very pretty," she said with assurance.

"What colour are your eyes?"

"Grey, with very dark lashes, and very bright."

"And your hair?"

"Brown, and very thick and curly, with a little gold through it—you know."

"And what kind of nose have you?"

"My nose!" said Clara, dubiously; "its nice—but I am afraid it's not so nice to look at side-ways as full-face."

"Humph!" said the boy; "and your mouth."

"Do you know a rose-bud? It's just like that," replied Clara, complacently.

"I was hoping it was large," said her questioner, disappointedly.

"It's large when I laugh," Clara hastened to say, sorry she had borrowed O'Leary's simile; "and I have three dimples, two on either side of my mouth, and one high up, close under my left eye; and very pretty teeth."

"You must be pretty," agreed the lad; "and I suppose you have a bright complexion?"

"Very rosy. I *am* pretty. Every one says I am like the portrait of my grandmother—and she was quite a beauty."

The lad laughed. "And now, will you tell me your name?" he said. Till this minute Clara had forgotten that she had omitted this important item. Settling herself, therefore, with much consequence, and

crossing her hands, she said slowly : "I am Miss Clara Saville of the Towers."

The announcement produced the amount of effect she anticipated ; but it was of a different kind. Her new acquaintance quickly turned his head towards her, and repeated her name in a tone of jarred surprise. Clara fancied a shadow settled down between them.

" And what is your name ? " she asked.

" Cecil Latheby," he answered.

Clara gave a little cry, and jumped down from her seat, causing Ghost, who had relaxed his vigilance and was napping in the sunshine, to start up also, and sharply bark reproof. " Latheby—one of the Lathebys who built the Towers, and whose pictures are hanging up ! "

" Their descendant ! " replied Cecil, with grave pride. " Did you not know we were coming back ? "

"I had forgotten," said Clara.

And so—she was standing before the descendant of the men whose eyes had seemed to flash down upon her from the pictures ; whose spurs her fancy had heard clattering down the corridors—and he was blind.

"I am not what you imagined a Latheby would be," said Cecil, putting her thoughts into words.

"No ; I always thought of the pictures. They have lace-collars and spurs," said Clara, slowly.

"Well, you see, we've gone down in the world since the pictures were painted," replied Cecil, with a smile peculiar to him ; a little bitter, but so bright that it gave the light of eyes to his face. "I know there are many pictures."

"Oh, ever so many," said Clara. "There's the portrait of Sir Basil hanging up in the

drawing-room, with his hand on a big mastiff's head. He has a lace-collar, and dark eyes that follow me about the room."

"That's the Latheby who fought for King Charles. He was chivalrous, meek, and brave, like Sir Galahad," said Cecil, with approval in his voice.

"Then there's one of a very pretty lady, in a blue velvet dress, holding a dove in her hand. Just over her head there's a hideous animal—a kind of crocodile, with outspread wings. I do not know why he's put there—she does not seem a bit frightened at him."

"That's the Lady Clementina. She was accused of some dreadful crime, but she was as good as she was beautiful, and her innocence was proved. The painter put a dove in her hand, to show how pure she was; and a dragon above, to represent Jealousy trying to taunt her. Is there not an illuminated

missal and crucifix by her side ? for she was a Catholic."

" Yes, there are. You know all about the Lathebys," said Clara, with a nod.

" Well, the only glory we have is that of our ancestors," replied Cecil. " The glory began to fade after the Lady Clementina ; her son was a brute."

" He looks a brute," agreed Clara, with emphasis. " His portrait just hangs opposite hers. He is like a fat bald eagle going to sleep."

" Is the tree still there, marking the place where Sir Basil fell wounded ? "

" Yes ; and there are the marks of Cromwell's balls on the outer walls."

" It's a grand old place," said Cecil, rising abruptly, and straining his blind eyes towards the sun. " He ought to have gone out and worked on the roads, sooner than have sold it to strangers. He ought to have

lived on bread and water sooner. What sort of man will the next owner be ? ”

“ No man will be the owner—I,” said Clara, with impish grandeur, “ I will be the Lady of the Towers ! ”

“ You ? ” said the lad. “ Then you and I can never be friends.”

“ Never ? ” repeated Clara, utterly extinguished.

“ Never ! ” insisted Cecil, with blunt emphasis. “ The Towers were given to my ancestors because they were valorous ; and your grandfather bought the place for money, as though it were a sack of hops. Common trees, common houses, can be bought for cash ; but not our trees, not our house.”

“ Oh ! ” said Clara, with a gasp.

“ It’s not your fault,” said Cecil, beginning to relent. “ But money can’t buy everything. It can’t buy one ancestor all his-

tory tells of; nor buy traditions that give grandeur to a place."

"I'll give it to you, as soon as it's mine!" said Clara, "if you give me the Dower House, for you know I must have a house."

"It would not be a fair exchange," replied Cecil, curtly. "I wonder where Mary is?" he added, with a gesture of impatience.

"Is Mary the little girl who went to pick the watercresses?"

"Yes; she is my sister. I am afraid she has lost her way—and I cannot find mine without her."

"I'll lead you," said Clara, coming closer, and touching his hand. "I know the way to your house."

Cecil hesitated. "I've thought of something—something that will make it all right," she said softly.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I won't tell you—not till I bid you good-

bye," she answered. Then as she watched the hesitation pass away from the blind face, she slipped her hand into his. Cecil whistled to Ghost, who barked interrogatively, trotted a few paces onwards, keeping watch upon Clara.

Hand in hand, the blind descendant of the Lathebys and the bright-eyed little heiress of the Towers crossed the sunny field, and entered the shady aisles of the glen, where the cuckoo shouted, and where the coo of the wood-pigeon sounded rhythmic and mysterious as the beat of love, pulsing through the spring day's heart. Clara's soft little hand felt the steady pressure of Cecil's fine sensitive fingers, that almost saw.

"I taught my bullfinch to whistle a little song I knew. Would you like me to sing it to you?" she asked, suddenly, after a silence.

"Thank you. I would like it very much."

Then swaying her head softly, and keeping

her eyes fixed on his face, Clara sang. It was exactly like singing to her blind bullfinch :

Jai encore i tel pasté,
Qui n'est mie de lasté,
Que nous mangerons Marote,
Bec à bec, et moi et vous—
Chi me r'atendés Marote,
Chi venrai parler à vous—”

“ Do you like it ? ” she asked.

“ It's beautiful ! ” said the lad, in a moved voice.

Clara's heart melted with delight. It was on the tip of her tongue to say, “ Papa taught me to sing it ; ” but remembering how the revelation of her father's presents had exposed him to Fred's scoffs, she withheld the information. “ I was going to teach my bullfinch another French song, when he died. I'll sing it to you, if you like.”

“ Pray do,” eagerly responded Cecil.

Clara was just opening her mouth, and beginning to sway her head, when Ghost

gave a bark, and set off at a gallop, to meet a small gray figure hastening towards them.

"There's your sister," said Clara, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh ! Cecil, I lost my way. I had to go home to find it again," cried Mary, coming up out of breath.

There was a spaniel look in the limpid brown eyes, that were first lifted to her brother, and then turned inquiringly to his guide.

"This is Miss Clara Saville, the lady of the Towers," said Cecil.

"Oh !" exclaimed Mary, shortly, too astonished to remember her manners.

"Well, my lady of the Towers, and what would set it all right between us ?" he asked, turning to Clara.

"Dont listen," she said to Mary, lifting her left hand to warn her off. Standing on tip-toe, she put her lips against Cecil's ear,

and whispered in her softest little voice—
“We might marry.” She looked up unblushing into his face for a minute, then slipped her hand out of his, and falling back a few steps dropped a stately courtesy.

“Good-bye,” she said.

“Good-bye,” answered Cecil, stifling a laugh.

Mary stepped in between, and appropriated her brother’s hand.

Clara watched the two figures retreating with rapid steps, that kept the accurate pace of four feet well accustomed to tread the same path together. The Newfoundland ran in front. When they turned the corner, Clara sped swiftly home.

Miss Beale, who had waited an hour for her pupil, had departed. Mrs. Saville was out. Clara knew she would be punished on her mother’s return for this freak. But she did not care. She had entered a region

where punishments seemed very trifling.
She was going to be married !

She wandered about the house restlessly. As she went up and down the stairs, she seemed to hear the blind boy's footsteps by her side.

" Yes, we'll be married," she said to herself. " My portrait will be here," looking at a vacant place by the window on the first landing. " I'll be dressed in white satin, with shining folds; and there will be red flowers in my hair, and a long feather. And I'll have a pearl necklace. I'll hold up my train, like the lady Clementina, over my arm —and my eyes will seem to follow the people, as they pass up and down, smiling and proud. —And my husband will be opposite; just here. He'll have a lace-collar and spurs." Then she paused, as on her husband's portrait she saw still the blind look—those beautiful blind eyes, that would make him so depend-

ent upon her for everything. "I'll attend to him all the day long," she said softly. I'll not let his sister do anything. I'll take him out, and tell him how everything looks —and I'll read for him, and sing."

Then she thought of their initials, so prettily twined together, placed everywhere
—C. S. C. L.

She was still standing on the staircase, her head against the glowing colours of a stained window, when Fred bustled in, actively shaking off all reminiscences of his morning studies.

"Fred!" she called, "hush! I have something to say to you."

"Why, Clara, how queer you look. What's the matter?" said Fred, drawing near.

"Hush!" again said Clara, with finger uplifted, looking like a small Sybil. "I am going to be married!"

"Married!" exclaimed Fred, standing over-awed before her.

"Yes; I am going to be married to the descendant of the former Lords of this place. You must not speak about it yet. It's a secret. As soon as I am old enough, we are to be married; and I am to be more than his wife to him. I am to be his eyes—for he is blind," said Clara, very slowly. She looked so mysterious, that Fred was in consternation.

"Pooh!" he said, after a pause, with a loud laugh, beginning energetically to swing himself from the balustrades. "He must be like the blind beggar that waits outside church on Sundays. He ought to go about with a board: 'Pity the blind!'"

"You're the worst, meanest, cruellest boy!" cried Clara, firing up. "He's a thousand, million, hundred times handsomer than you are, with your eyes that see."

She had been so absorbed that she had not noticed Mrs. Saville standing in the hall.

"Go into your room, child," said this lady, now coming up. Following Clara, she entered and locked the door behind her. By a few sharp questions she drew from her where she had been, and whom she had met. "So you have been making friends with Mr. Latheby's son," Mrs. Saville went on when the examination was concluded. "I heard what you said to Fred—your silly, sentimental speech. That, when you are older, you mean to marry the descendant of the Lords of this place. Do you know why Mr. Latheby has come to Fareham? He has come hoping to find some way of getting back this property. To take it away from you—for that blind boy. He would if he could. Do you understand? To make you a beggar?" Then in the same trench-

ant tones she went on describing to the child what poverty involved : its privations, its daily humiliations. In conclusion, she ordered Clara to remain in her room all day. Should she ever speak to the blind lad again she was to be sent to a boarding-school.

There was no need for this threat. Left alone, Clara pondered over her mother's words. She liked to be the giver, but the instinct of possession was strong in her. The idea of marrying the descendant of the Lathebys flattered her. She would be conferring a boon—she would be making everything right. But to be despoiled was another matter. Every instinct rebelled against that. After a while she went to a table, took up a pen, and began to write slowly and laboriously at first; then the pen scratched more quickly over the paper. As she wrote, the red blood flushed

her cheek, her passionate little lips slightly parted to give vent to her hurried breathing.

That evening there was a dinner-party down-stairs. Clara felt sure O'Leary would come in to her with some dainty. The old Nurse came, as she had anticipated, and Clara cajoled her into leaving the door of her room unlocked. She watched her opportunity; quickly she slid out of the house, made her way to the village post-office, and deposited a letter in the box.

Next morning, as Mr. Latheby and his children were at breakfast, the postman called at the Dower House, and claiming an extra charge left an unstamped letter, addressed in a round, careful hand-writing,

*“ Cecil Latheby, Esq.,
The blind boy,
The Dower House,
Fareham.”*

"What a funny address! It's for you, Cecil," said Mary, opening the envelope, as was her right over Cecil's letters. She read as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,

"I had the pleasure of meeting you to-day in the field, behind the mill, and of talking to you. I have the honour of writing to you now, to tell you that I shall never marry you—NEVER." [This last word was written in larger letters than the rest, and forcibly scratched under three times. The writing, that had hitherto been punctiliously neat and prim, now became erratic.] "And when I meet you I shall not speak to you. But I want you to know, that I think it *mean* and *horrid* to want to take back something that has already been paid for; and my mother paid *a heap of money* for the Towers. I think it is like being a Reubber to try to get them back for nothing.

"This is all I have to say." [Here the

writing resumed its ambitious evenness.]

“And I beg to remain,

“Dear Sir,

“Yours truly,

“CLARA SAVILLE.”

Cecil exploded into a laugh; his father exploded into a rage. “The impudent minx! The low-bred brat!” fumed Mr. Latheby, bringing his hand down on the table, and making all the tea-cups rattle.

“There is some truth in what she says,” said Cecil, after a pause.

“Truth, sir!” exclaimed Mr. Latheby, purple with wrath, and facing his son. “I have explained to you what it means; and yet you would lie down meekly and accept the bar sinister; you would let your ancestral honour be attacked.”

Here he stopped; for the deep sockets of Cecil’s dimmed eyes filled with passion, and

his lips trembled. That expression in the blind face always smote the father with pity, and he left the room, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER V.

Hotspur. I tell you what,—
He held me, last night, at least nine hours,
In reckoning up the several devils' names
That were his lackeys: I cried, “Humph,”—and
“Well,—go to,—”
But mark'd him not a word. O, he's as tedious
As is a tired horse, an ailing wife ;
Worse than a smoky house . . .
Mortimer. In faith, he is a worthy gentleman,
Exceedingly well read, and profited
In strange concealments . . .

MR. LATHEBY was decidedly eccentric. There was a certain hill overlooking the Towers, which he ascended every evening in summer. His two children lay or sat at his feet while he recounted to them his visions as Lord of the place. He would point out to them the groves he would level, the fields he would drain, the carriage-drives he would widen, the rooms they would appropriate,

till they knew one—that with the oriel window — as Cecil's room ; another as Mary's ; that other as the master's library. He would tell of the Scotch cattle that should graze on yonder hill ; of the stud of hunters in the stable. He spoke with such vivid realism, that every evening those hungry young mortals required more and more stories to be told them. Sometimes the little girl would say, in the midst of this barmecide possession : “ But what is to become of the poor people who now own the Towers ? ”

“ Who cares ? Let them return to their beer-barrels,” the narrator would sharply reply. Then, full and mellifluous, his voice would take up the interrupted story of his dream.

Mr. Latheby had a craze and a mania that he was the legitimate Lord of the Towers. A plaster model of the ancestral

home, he had had made at great expense, stood under a glass globe in the room of the Dower House that was especially his own. There was also in that room an impressive genealogical tree of the Lathebys, drawn by himself, with loving elaboration. There, the marriage of Sir Michael, his grandfather, with Grace Stevens, was boldly set down, four years before the date of the existing marriage certificate ; and the birth of George, their eldest son, Mr. Latheby's father, was recorded three years before that of their only other child, the late Sir Peter. Mr. Latheby was always speaking of a bundle of letters, found among his deceased uncle's papers, in which his grandfather distinctly addressed the lady Grace as his wife, before the birth of their eldest child. He was always shewing a plain gold ring that he vowed was his grandmother's wedding-ring, on which was scratched the date, " 23rd

June, 1790"—whereas the date of the existing marriage certificate was November, 1794. This ring was embedded in a velvet case, and kept under glass, with a small mirror behind it.

Mary did not understand the value of those letters or of that ring. Some story of shame was attached to her great-grandmother's name, thus far she grasped ; but it was false ; she was lily-white in her purity. There was a miniature of this lady, hanging up with some others in Cecil's room. The colours wherewith it was painted had faded, for it had a somewhat unmodelled and pallid appearance ; notwithstanding this, and the insipid prettiness of the *pose*, it showed a frank, kindly countenance. This portrait had an attraction for Mary, who fancied she saw in it what others did not see. She knew that the original, before her marriage, had been a singer. Mr. Latheby always

spoke of her as the very consummation of genius. He linked the names together of “The Malibran,” “The Jenny Lind,” “The Lady Grace.”

It may as well be said here, that the Lady Grace had only appeared in a third-rate part in the London Opera of her day, before she suddenly left the stage. It was a foible, however, of Mr. Latheby's to magnify everything connected with himself. He said, “my house, my horse, my son,” in a tone that invested them with a single and special distinction.

There was a background of expectancy, of immense possibilities, always present in the children's lives, kept up by the stories and the demeanour of their father. Sometimes, with incredible faith, in addressing the farmers and labourers, Mr. Latheby would assume an air of authority, as if he believed himself already “Lord of the Manor;” and

he would turn round to look for approval on his children's wondering faces.

He was friendly with all, until any one implied some improvement had been made in the place of late ; then came the splash and the sputter, as of foam rising when a stone is dropped into the water. When Mrs. Saville's carriage passed, with the family inside it, he walked on, with head erect and straightened back. This modest fortune he considered poverty for a Latheby ; and he therefore shunned familiarity with Fareham society. He seldom accepted invitations to dinner from the county families, although he met them on public occasions.

“ We'll not exhibit the shreds and patches of the old family,” he would say with a little querulousness to his children. “ I'd rather wear the old coat tattered to a beggar's gaberdine than a Duke's ermine, but we'll hide the tatters.”

As for himself, he felt, or affected to feel, a marvellous contentment with the simplicity of his meals. He held his glass of claret to the light, and looked through it as if it were the vintage of some comet year. Mutton he vowed was as tasty as venison, without its richness ; he would choose it, were he at the Queen's table. He asserted plain fare was the diet that suited him ; for Mr. Latheby had his parasite, the gout, the genuine growth of blue blood. Mary knew when an attack was coming ; he was fidgety and cross, and came down hard upon Mrs. Saville. When the gout was over his amiability blossomed. On the whole, he liked the complaint. It was the best of all maladies ; for some reasons, preferable to vulgar, low-bred health.

“ Why, child,” he would say to Mary, when the worst twinges were over, and he could sit up with his swollen foot propped

on a chair before him, “do you think (with a side nod in the direction of the Towers) the publican’s daughter there could get gout? Not if she wished it. It’s not the port a man drinks, but the port his ancestors have drunk, that gives him gout.” To be vicariously punished for his ancestors’ sins gave dignity to Mr. Latheby’s sufferings. It was a tie between him and the Towers, and enabled him to bear with more equanimity the sight of the grand old mansion.

It was also a characteristic trait of Mr. Latheby’s, that out of the very fulness of his pride he chose to go about in shabby clothes. He had a decent black coat which he seldom donned, preferring to be seen in an old shooting-jacket and crushed wide-awake hat, which he wore with the dignified ease and affable air of a country gentleman. “These dressy folk,” he said, “they take shiny broad-cloth and rustling silk for armorial bearings;

your true gentleman shines through his attire. My friend, the Duke of Gresham, used to dress in an old velveteen suit, and looked every inch a gentleman. It's not every one can afford to be shabby. Half Hare the solicitor's custom depends upon that ship-coil of a watch-chain he hangs over his stomach—dressiness and vulgarity—vulgarity and dressiness."

Mr. Latheby fought shy of the advances of Fareham society. But there was one person to whom he was all assiduity. For Barbara Liston he reserved his finest blandishments. To her he would go as to a well, in the hope of drawing up buckets of information ; but the well was deep, and his buckets came up empty. Barbara maintained the same imperturbable demeanour to all his wily questions and cunning cajoleries. Mr. Latheby on his way home would rail and fume at the old woman, but would again

return to the charge, and ever to no purpose. Mr. Latheby patronized the farmers, who still called him Squire, and played up to his weaknesses. His ancestral halo ensured his popularity among them. They looked down upon the new people in the Towers—folk who could not recognize the ghost of their great-grandfather were they to meet him, not possessing so much as a portrait of him while in the flesh. The farmers would tell “the Squire” queer tales of Mrs. Saville’s stinginess, and how she drove her husband to the bad. Mr. Latheby enjoyed these tales prodigiously. They put him into good humour for the day. He chuckled over them all the way home, and repeated them humorously to his children after dinner, while sipping the sour claret that did duty for Chambertin.

“ You’re a clever little housekeeper, Polly, my dear, but your housekeeping is nothing

to hers. She goes down into the kitchen and counts the potatoes. What d' ye think of that—eh? By George, she'd count the peas, if she could. The publican's daughter has an eye to business. You'd not clear the blood of accounts if you filtered it through all the gold in Queen Victoria's kingdom."

Once Mary suggested that the late Mr. Saville had not been a publican, but a brewer.

"A wholesale publican," insisted Mr. Latheby, knitting his brows.

One sentiment, amid all this pompous self-deception, bloomed fresh and pure—love for his blind boy. From his earliest childhood the little lad had been endeared to him by a thousand ties. His dependence, his high spirits, his cleverness, and his beauty, had awakened all the wholesome qualities of his father's heart. Indeed, it

may be said that the extinguished light of Cecil's eyes had gone to light a taper of devotion in the little household.

Mr. Latheby was determined that Cecil should be brought up as befitted the heir of the ancestral place. He had a private tutor for the lad, and he patronized this gentleman as became a Lord of Acres. He also rubbed up his own Greek and Latin, to be able to read the classics for Cecil when the tutor left. Mr. Latheby prided himself on his reading aloud. He had a taste for declamation, inherited from the "Lady Grace."

He liked the reading, but did not care for the music, which was Cecil's craze; and always managed to go out for a walk when the practice began; but he got for his son the best musical instruction the more advanced town of Henshaw could supply, and with the proceeds of a small legacy bought

for him a grand Erard piano. Music was a necessity to Cecil. It lifted him to a sphere where his soul revelled in all the glory of colour and form, independent of sight. From earliest childhood the little lad had felt the power of music to make him forget the darkness that was his fate.

When the mother was alive, and obscurity was beginning to deepen about the child of four, Cecil would sit on her lap, a rapt bundle, and pick out with his mite of a fore-finger, absolutely innocent of the mistakes he was making, some of the tunes she had been playing to him—Weber's last waltz, or Rousseau's dream; following the melody with a tuneful hum, and with child-like intensity of happiness. Mr. Latheby, although he could not tell one tune from another, pretended to be delighted when his son played to him. He whistled, or performed a tum-tum with his finger-nails on

the table, in token of genial companionship.

The boy was a fine, strong lad. It was a marvel to see the high manly spirit in which he took everything. There was a lusty soul of life about him, that awoke a sort of pity to watch him, so unconscious of his affliction, and of its consequences ; rejoicing in existence out of the exuberance of health and energy. Nothing delighted the lad so well as when Mary led him to a good level plain ; at her signal that all was clear, he would run and leap, enjoying the sense of the wind flapping around his head ; and stopping only when she clapped her hands and called out.

Mary was his companion. The state of her brother thus imprisoned in darkness was a haunting consciousness ever present at lessons, and at play, or in her little bed at night. In this one unselfish channel ran

every effort, every thought of her life. All her childish zeal and energy went the same pathetic way. She prattled of nature to Cecil, observing every change on its ever-changing face. Her simple enunciation was pleasanter to him than his father's impressive declamation ; and it was she who first opened to him the priceless stores of classic English literature. They read together, as children, what many might have been shocked at their reading ; but the eyes of their understanding were far removed from evil.

They were the best of play-fellows. No merrier trio could be seen on a summer's morning than the blind boy, his little sister, and Ghost, the big Newfoundland, setting off for a day upon the sea. The dog entered so completely into the children's lives, shared so entirely Mary's solicitude for Cecil, that a little—a very little more, and he would have

barked his appreciation of a fine prospect. Mary thought sometimes that if Cecil could not see with his eyes, he saw through every pore of his body. How bravely he walked along, with head thrown back, sniffing the air. He knew when the shadow-clouds scudded over the moors, or made purple islands on the beryl-green sea. That sudden burst of sea under the cliffs, with the brown boats, and the sense of immensity it brought with it ; how the children quickened their steps as they neared it. The sea, the blithe, coaxing, treacherous sea—with its Lorelei song and its waves flaked with ermine—was a play-fellow ; its coves and caves their enchanted play-ground. It was a world of sight to Mary, and a world of sound to Cecil. The fisher-folk that lived on it were their friends. Cecil was as sturdy as any in a boat. He enjoyed going out for a day's fishing, and giving a pull to trawl up the

nets, with the opal fish bouncing in their prison.

The sea and the Towers resumed all Fareham to the children — the old house with its purple granite towers standing amid its belt of ancestral woods. Often of an afternoon they would climb the hill overlooking it with the half-conscious feeling of exiles, and continue the stories their father told them in the evening. There they made their schemes, and Cecil would say, “If ever I come into possession I shall have a grand organ ; and I’ll revive the old games on the green, and in the courtyard of the Towers ; and we won’t let one person be poor in Fareham.” Mary would add, “We’ll give old Harris a new cottage.”

They were like the wandering children of Israel gazing from afar upon the promised land ; debarred from entering it, yet feeling it inalienably theirs. They had once, when

Mrs. Saville was absent, pushed their way surreptitiously into the grounds, and stood with beating hearts upon the soil the heroism of their fathers had made sacred. Like spies returning from Canaan, they came back to the Dower House laden with flowers and fruit, the gift of the gardener. At the sight of these spoils Mr. Latheby's wrath was roused.

"You young whelps!—never go there again. Flee the place, as if it had the plague. The idea of my children entering as strangers; receiving as gifts that which ought to be theirs."

They never entered again; but the old house grew all the more attractive for the interdict. Mary told Cecil of every ogive, of every mark or crevice on the walls. The blind lad, with that precious glimmer of light keeping him from utter darkness, with vivid imaginings of that still-remembered

world of colour and form, realized what she told him. He saw more than she did. He saw the portraits, hanging on the walls, of that long line of ancestors ; the manuscripts and books in the library ; above all, the hallowed spot where Sir Basil fell fighting for his king. Blind, he lived in an intensely real world, where everything stood out objectively vivid that appealed to his emotions. That Sir Basil, of whom the old chronicles said, "To the poor, his countenance did shine as the sun, at whose rising all noxious vapours flee," appeared to Cecil as a paladin in golden armour, beautiful as a seraph, whose serious countenance bore the impress of that indomitable allegiance to duty, that included at once loyalty to his king and obligations to his dependants.

Cecil was twelve when he came to Fareham, but the beautiful face looked sixteen, from the force of its expression.

CHAPTER VI.

“Say, from whence
You owe this strange intelligence? or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting?”

Macbeth.

IT IS A bright summer morning, ten years after the tide of excitement had broken over Fareham at the news that Mr. Latheby and his family were coming to inhabit the Dower-House. Mr. Latheby is sitting in the room that he dignifies by the name of “study.” It is a pleasant room, bearing evidence of its owner’s pursuits and prejudices, and also of a woman’s presiding taste. It is long and low; oak rafters run across the ceiling, from which hangs at one end an

immense genealogical tree, in a dark frame. Opposite to it is a book-case, every volume in which is stamped with the crest and motto, "Toujours vaillant," of the Lathebys. Above the book-case is a sheaf of weapons and a battered shield. The sun reflects a dusty glory over the trophies. On a table by itself is the plaster model of the Towers, Mr. Latheby has had made, to enable Cecil to handle, and know by heart, the home of his ancestors. Some old family portraits hang on the walls; the portly Sir Montagu, with a pillar and a curtain behind him; Lady Joan, painted by Lely, in yellow satin, smiling on her descendant, underneath her is an enlarged replica of the miniature in Cecil's room of Mr. Latheby's grandmother. The diamond-paned windows are open, and are framed round by creeping plants, through whose leaves the light is shining; on the sill lies an open book with raised letters.

The sound of a piano is heard rising and falling from a distant room.

During those ten years, that wizard Time has performed his usual prodigies, and wrought his usual transformations on the characters in this history ; yet it would be impossible not to recognize Mr. Latheby in the portly, round-shouldered, bald gentleman before us. His shooting-jacket is not a whit more new, or in the fashion, than when we saw him first. His manner has grown more pompously fussy, and his voice more emphasized in its tone of aggressive complaisance.

The pretty, slight, dark-haired girl, who sits opposite to him bending over her work, is Mary. When she raises her eyes to answer her father, we see in them the sensitive, dog-like expression, that gave so much pathos to the child-face.

“I tell you, Polly, this is the crowning

injustice ; an old tenant—an old tenant—an old tenant,” reiterates Mr. Latheby, “ turned out. That good, respectable creature, who knew our family, ejected.”

“ You mean Barbara Liston, papa,” answers Mary, unable to suppress a smile ; for Mr. Latheby’s affection for Barbara dates from the hour that she has been ill-used by Mrs. Saville.

“ Of course I do. I shall call this very afternoon on her, to express my sympathy. That good old woman, who has held her farm for fifty years ! It is unheard of treatment—unheard of ! And you mean to tell me, Polly,” he goes on, rising and going to the window, “ that a woman like Mrs. Saville, who has no sense of duty towards her tenantry, no reverence for what is beautiful and sacred in antiquity, who is always absent—abroad, bless my soul ! these five years ;—you mean to tell me that such a

woman has a right to be the mistress of an ancestral property!"

"She is ill, they say, and obliged to travel," replied Mary.

"Ill! Hypochondriac! Those new-made people—their money is their bane. They neither know how to spend it or to enjoy it. They die of dissipation, or they sicken with *ennui*. Iniquitous!" Mr. Latheby exclaimed, sitting down again, and pushing away some papers. "Sale and purchase alike iniquitous! Good heavens! If I could but cancel that bargain, now of fourteen years' standing! I wish it, for the sake of removing the bar sinister from our name—for the sake of Cecil, I wish it—but, by Heaven! I wish it most for the sake of the tenants!"

"But neither you nor Cecil have any sympathy with me in this matter," he resumed pettishly, as Mary remained silent.

"Indeed, papa, you are unjust to Cecil in

saying that," replied Mary warmly, taking up the cudgels in her brother's defence, and ignoring the attack on herself. She is as she was as a child, scarce conscious of herself as an individuality ; still simply Cecil's eyes. "He sympathizes with you. See, what interest he takes in the history you are writing."

"Well, yes. I admit he does that—and, by the way, I have come across an interesting allusion—a most interesting allusion—to our ancestor Sir Hugh—in an obscure French chronicle. Just call Cecil down, and I'll read it for you both."

Mr. Latheby has spent those eleven years in the indulgence of his two hobbies. He has his grievance, and he is writing a voluminous history of the Lathebys. He has sunned and fanned the golden tail of his hereditary vanity in resuscitating the glory of the past ; and every day he has deplored

the mismanagement of the estate. It has been the object of his walks to discover some new matter for complaint. "The place is going to rack and ruin—to rack and ruin, sir," he says to Cecil every day—after dinner. A lodge was pulled down. Mr. Latheby spoke of it for months. "That dear old lodge—with the griffins—pulled down—destroyed, sir—carted away like rubbish. Was there ever such an act of Vandalism! A work of art, sir, sanctified by traditions—and a thing put up in its place—as hideous and as glaring as a post-office." Of late Mrs. Saville's absence had formed the principal subject of complaint. "If the woman is mistress of the place, why does she not live in it? There she is, absent, sir—absent—till her steward almost fancies himself lord of the manor." Mr. Latheby taxed Cecil with not caring about the matter; when to his reiterated question, "What right has

such a woman to be mistress of our ancestral place?" Cecil would answer: "Well, she has paid her money for it." Yet, in his heart, the young man sympathized with his father's grumblings.

A moment after Mary had left the room in search of her brother, the piano stopped, and immediately after the door opened and Cecil entered. During these years he had developed into manly beauty, subtilized by his infirmity, which cast over his countenance an expression of solicitous thought.

"Well, father; and how is the history getting on?"

"I've written nothing this morning. I've been so put out," said Mr. Latheby, plaintively, rubbing his forehead. "This news about old Barbara's ejectment has so roused me, I cannot fix my mind upon anything else."

"There is a rumour that the Savilles

are coming back," says Cecil. "Jollies has just told me so. I wonder what sort of young lady the winsome little girl, who spoke to me in the fields, has grown up?"

"Grown up! a finely dressed Parisienne. The *parvenu* inscribed from head to foot upon her," growls Mr. Latheby, beginning to search through his papers.

"She said an odd thing to me; she said that we might marry," said Cecil lightly, with an amused smile.

"Yes; but if you also remember, Cecil," put in Mary, laughing, "she very quickly went back upon her proposal. The very next morning's post brought an indignant retraction of it."

"Well, and what would you think if it came to pass after all—that I married her—and became Lord of the Towers?" rejoined Cecil, half-playfully.

The thought of the little maid, whom he

had met that cowslip morning, had long faded out of Cecil's mind, as might the memory of the flickered sunlight on his hand, or the summer twitterings of birds; yet occasionally something would bring it up, and he would express a passing wonder concerning her to Mary.

"Faugh! Let us dismiss the thought of those vulgar people," said Mr. Latheby, looking up from an open volume. "Look here. I stumbled this morning on this remarkable allusion to a certain 'Sire de Latheby.' Let me see—here it is. It is in an old chronicle—of the time of Philippe de Valois."

Mr. Latheby was just beginning to read out, when a servant-girl, who had only lately entered the Dower House service, and who was a stranger to Fareham, came in to announce that an old lady wished to speak to the master.

"I cannot see any one; say that I am engaged," said Mr. Latheby, huffily.

As he was replacing the double eyeglass on his nose to find the particular passage he was in search of, the servant came in again to say the old lady was pressing, and insisted that she must see him.

"Must!" exclaimed Mr. Latheby. "Ask her name."

"Perhaps I had better go down to see her," said Mary, rising.

"Certainly not, my dear." Let us know her name first. Some old gossip or beggar. Too bad to have one's morning broken up by an old crone's chatter."

The servant came in once more, to say the old lady refused to give her name, and she did not want to see Miss Latheby. She had sent up this message: "Tell Mr. Latheby I have something to say he must hear."

"Let her come up, father," said Cecil; "we'll stand by and defend you, if she prove an importunate widow, with intentions against your purse."

"Show her up," said Mr. Latheby, shutting the book, and putting away his papers, with emphatic resignation.

Immediately after, the click of a stick on the ground was heard; and a bent, weird figure stood on the threshold. She was dressed in a spare black silk and heavy Paisley shawl; a black bonnet, of the last generation, was fastened over a frilled cap, from which escaped two locks of rough white hair. Eleven years have made little difference in Barbara Liston's parchment appearance; but to-day there is a sort of vindictive brightness in her eye—a decision on her bloodless lips, that irresistibly suggests a mummy come to life for some mission. She paused before entering the

room, and dropped a curtsey of marked humility.

It was the first time Barbara had entered the Dower House. Hitherto she had refused all invitations to do so.

At sight of the old woman, Mr. Latheby's huffiness left him. He came forward to meet her with effusive anxiety.

"Well, Mrs. Liston, how are you? I was going round this very afternoon to call upon you, to say how deeply I sympathize with you. Sit down." And he drew the most comfortable arm-chair towards her.

"I want to say something to you alone, sir," said Barbara, taking no notice of the chair, or of Mr. Latheby's greeting. There was a sternness and an impressiveness about the old woman's bearing that was almost repellent.

"Certainly. If you wish it, my son and daughter will leave us," said Mr. Latheby, with suppressed excitement.

"I should like to see you alone, sir," repeated Barbara.

"Send up the best port, my dear," said Mr. Latheby to Mary, as she and Cecil were leaving the room.

While waiting for the wine, Mr. Latheby busied himself about Barbara. He put her in the arm-chair. He placed a footstool under her feet. He shut the window by her side. When the wine came up, he poured out a glass and brought it to her.

Barbara, meanwhile, sat wrapped in silence. She seemed charged to the muzzle with some mystery. When the wine was handed to her she put it away, with an expression of intense significance. She still kept looking into vacancy—still kept rubbing her knee.

"I am more of your family than hers," she said at last, abruptly. "I knew them all,

my dear. Your father, Sir Michael, and your mother."

"What? Who did you know?" asked Mr. Latheby, in a flurry.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I forgot. I thought I was speaking to your father, Mr. George."

"Yes; just so. You are the last of the old tenants. You knew my father and grandfather and his wife well, Mrs. Liston. They had the greatest regard and respect for you and your mother," Mr. Latheby said blandly, struggling with his agitation.

"There's my farm," went on Barbara, clenching her bony hand, and tapping her knee—going on as if talking to herself. "It was mine. Sir Peter said it was as good as mine. 'Tis as good as yours, Mrs. Liston'—that was his very word—and the lawyer said just the same—'It's as good as yours, Mrs. Liston.' And when the Towers

were sold, I see it all put down—particular—written down and signed. I was to have the farm ; and now she wants to turn me off like a dog—with twenty pounds' pensation—and a cottage with a strip of garden—no better nor an almshouse ”—

“ Shameful ! But what can you expect from a publican's daughter ? ” burst out Mr. Latheby, violently fanning himself with his handkerchief as a vent for his impatience during the old woman's wearisome prelude, yet bent upon indulging to the full Barbara's wrath against the Savilles. “ A tenant so respected,” he went on ; “ I assure you, Mrs. Liston, I feel as an injury to myself this proceeding against an old retainer—of my family. You knew my grandmother well,” he observed, anxiously, leading Barbara back to the point from which she had wandered.

“ She's no real born lady. Her father,

I've heard say, was no better than one of the labourers," said Barbara, whose abrupt tones contrasted with Mr. Latheby's mellifluous accents.

"He *was* a labourer."

"And to see her putting on the airs of a fine lady, affecting to be sick, and lying on her sofey all day! But she'll repent it," said Barbara, slowly nodding her head. "She'll find out I'm not the only one will have to turn out of house and home."

"Just so; just so," said Mr. Latheby, breathing hard. For a moment the power to be coaxing and flattering deserted him. He felt giddy in the anticipation of at last getting on the track of that information held back so long, that if the clue to it had been laid in a tomb, the moss by this time must have covered the gravestone.

"If I had been treated fair and honest, I'd not say it—'twas all written down I'd

have the farm—all business-like and proper—written down by a lawyer too,—” said Barbara, again wandering from the point, and with the glitter of dotage in her eyes.

“ My dear woman,” said Mr. Latheby, assuming a methodic business tone, “ you have something of importance to communicate. You have been shamefully treated. You belong to the Lathebys, and should not sacrifice their interests to those of the Savilles. Your mother was my grandmother’s confidential maid. She was with her at the time of her marriage with Sir Michael—she must have told you of it.”

“ Talked to me often,” said the old woman, patting her hand and shaking her head.

“ Exactly; exactly. I am sure of it,” said Mr. Latheby, drawing a deep breath. “ I knew there were reasons for the marriage being kept secret. My grandmother was a singer. Sir Michael was poor. All the

money he expected was his aunt's, and she would not have left him a shilling, if she knew he married a lady who sang in public."

"All the same they *were* married while she was living," said Barbara, with a gleam.

"You are sure—while she was living?" asked Mr. Latheby, with a fierce effort to appear calm.

Again Barbara began to stray away hopelessly from the point, but he brought her back.

"They were married in June. Your father, Master George, was born the May after; and if I'm to be struck dead, that's the truth," said Barbara, bringing down her umbrella with a thump.

"Where were they married?" he asked, with the same enforced calm.

"There!" said Barbara, pointing with a trembling finger to the village church.

“By whom?”

“By Mr. Lasham.”

“Who were the witnesses?”

Barbara’s mind did not grasp the question; it was again beginning to drift away.

“Now listen,” said Mr. Latheby with desperate patience. “This is what I want you to try to remember—were there people present—at the marriage—friends, you know, who wrote down their names in the registry? Do you understand?”

“There was my mother, sir—and my lady’s uncle. Mother told me so—over and over again—she tells me all the ins and outs of it, and I remember the day myself.”

“You remember it?”

“Remember it! I should think so,” with a touch of scorn in her tone. “There are things you don’t forget, and that was one of them. I was a sharp girl of eleven—I knew what I was about—and I re-

member—as if I saw them now—seeing mother and my lady that morning—”

“ You saw them ; you swear you saw them,” said Mr. Latheby, whose blandness had deserted him at this crisis. “ Tell me what you remember.”

Barbara nodded. “ I remember waking up—’twas early—the candles were burning in the next room—although it was mid-summer—and I got up—and I peeped in—and there was my lady dressed in grey, with a feather in her hat. I knew there was something—when I clapped eyes on her by the ways of her—and the looks. We were living a bit out of Fareham then—it’s all changed now—since the new folks came—and I stood there—they didn’t see me. And mother says—I remember plain as if I hear her speaking now : ‘ It goes against me, child ’—she was that free with my lady, like her own daughter—‘ your marrying secret

like. Those secrets—no good comes of them—mark my words.’ That’s what she said, if I never speak again till judgment day—that’s the very word she said: ‘Those secrets, no good comes of them.’ ”

“ Did my grandmother answer ? ”

“ My lady laughed, and said, ‘ You dear old fidget.’ That’s her words—many a time they’ve come back to me. ‘ You dear old fidget,’ she says, ‘ Michael and I’ll be married tight as if ’twas the Archbishop of Canterbury tied the knot, though nobody’s there to see it done but you and uncle.’ And just as she says that they turn and see me. Lor, bless me ! — they looked scared, for they knew I was a sharp child.”

“ Pray, go on,” jerked out Mr. Latheby, drumming the table with his clenched fist as Barbara stopped.

“ They made me promise not to say a word I’d seen, or what I’d heard—it’ud bring my

lady sorrow and trouble — and then they went away together.”

“ How did they get away ? ” asked Mr. Latheby.

“ They got up in a carriage with the blinds drawn, and my lady’s uncle on the box, driving—and I watched ’em driving off. Mother told me my lady was coming back months after—to another part of the country, where mother and me were waiting for her, in a house with a big garden. I remember that—and ’twas in that house Mr. George was born. And that’s the truth, if I’m to be struck dead,” said Barbara, resorting to her favourite adjuration, and again bringing her umbrella down with another thump on the ground.

“ You’ll swear to all you’ve said to me ? ” said Mr. Latheby.

“ Yes, yes—I’ll swear to it—safe enough,” said Barbara, with a tone of firm brevity.

"How right I have been! how right!" exclaimed Mr. Latheby, tapping the table sharply, and starting from his chair. After the first exultant delight came a secondary tide of feeling.

"But why, in heaven's name, my good woman, have you kept all this back so long?" he said, stopping short in his talk and facing Barbara.

At this question the old woman's face assumed some of its old impassibility.

"'Twas Sir Peter gave me the farm—with his own hand—every sod and twig in it—he gave me—I'd not tell against him—as long as I was holding it of Mrs. Saville—I knew better than say a word. She wronged the dead, sir; she wronged the dead—dear old Sir Peter!—when she—broke the—bargain with him."

"I shall not press any question you do not wish to answer," said Mr. Latheby,

apologetically, after a pause. "I am a little flurried; I cannot help it — some day I trust to have it in my power to prove my gratitude to you. But you will understand my anxiety to ascertain the truth. Good God ! the legitimacy of my father's birth—my children's inheritance at stake ! My good woman, you must not be angry if I am tedious; will you help me to put this strange story together ?" he went on, putting his hand in Barbara's. "I am so auxious to make it clear to you—I must make it so plain. Of course, you are aware that the only record existing of my grandfather's and grandmother's marriage is the copy of a marriage license, dated three years after the birth of my father. What was the necessity of this second marriage ? Where is the registry of the first ?"

"Where it is, sir ! It's only the old

parson, Mr. Lasham, could tell you that," said Barbara. "But I'll tell you what I know, sir, by my own remembering of things, and by what mother told me. Lor, bless you ! she knew all the ins and outs of it."

" Trust me. I shall reward you ; my children will help me to take care of you," said Mr. Latheby, taking up an ivory pen-knife, and bending it till it snapped in two.

" Mother told me. Sir Michael and Mr. Lasham were hand in glove together. They were friends at college—and Sir Michael gave him the living. He was never much of a parson, to my thinking—saving your presence—sir."

" Ah, yes, I know he drank, and followed the hounds like a squire," said Mr. Latheby.

" Drank !" repeated Barbara, shaking her old head, as if it would never stop wagging.

" Well ?" said Mr. Latheby.

" Well, when Sir Michael comes and tells him he's sweet on a lady his aunt would look down on, the rector—you see—says he'll marry them—and nobody be the wiser—till the old lady dies—and her will can't be unmade. Then, says he, it would be easy to tell it out, and say they were man and wife all along. That's the reason they were married secret like—as I've just been telling ye."

"Just so; I quite understand," said Mr. Latheby.

"It goes on all right for a time," resumed Barbara in her mechanical tone. "We live miles and miles away—and Sir Michael coming there often—till one day when Mr. George was just one year old—and beginning to stand all alone—I was a kind of nurse to him—bless you!—he'd cry when I run away from him—he was always delicate like—he was—"

"Yes, yes; you were saying something happened one day," put in Mr. Latheby nervously.

"I remember it; Sir Michael coming and calling my lady away—and after a bit—she comes running back—wringing her hands—and she takes up Mr. George and kisses him—crying over him."

"What had happened?" asked Mr. Latheby sharply, as Barbara paused.

"I'll tell ye—as mother told me. I've kept it in all this time—and they tried to get it out of me—but, bless you! they did not know me. I'll tell it now though—for I've not been treated fair, nor was Sir Peter—who gave me the farm—and that's what mother tells me. Sir Michael says to my lady that day, that it's reached his aunt they're married—and that he and Mr. Lasham had words together—some days before about it—Sir Michael said 'twas only

the parson could have babbled about it. The rector swore he was innocent—and next day what does he do? He comes and tells Sir Michael he has destroyed the registry of the marriage, so his aunt can never find it out. He says he tore out the page—and sat up all night copying the registry of the other marriages up in the corners—and that's gospel truth I'm saying, as I'll stand up and say it on judgment day. The rector tells Sir Michael he's done it for friendship sake, and that he'll be hung if it's found out—and so neither my lady nor Sir Michael dare say a word, for it would have been hanging the parson to have spoken about it in those days."

"I should like to hear the rest of the story," said Mr. Latheby, feebly mopping his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief.

"There's not much to tell now. My lady was never her old self after that. She would

cry when she looked at Mr. George. And Sir Michael also kept away, for the look of it ; and not long after his aunt dies, leaving him all her money. My lady's uncle—then comes down. He had a mortal disease—I heard mother say—and he swears he'll tell everything, and Mr. Lasham will hang by the neck for it, unless there's another marriage. He swears he'll not die till it's all right before law. My lady would not at first—for 'twas like wronging Mr. George, she said. But what between Sir Michael's and her uncle's prayers, and feeling the rights of it, she lets herself be persuaded—and one morning they go quietly to London, and are married again."

"Good God ! This then is the history of that marriage certificate !" ejaculated Mr. Latheby.

"Yes," said Barbara, in the same abrupt tone, "and a year after Sir Peter is born—

and my lady, who had fretted and moped,
dies in child-birth."

"But," said Mr. Latheby, after a silence, carefully picking his words, "your memory may recall to you. Don't you remember, my grandfather treated his eldest son with coldness, preferring to him the second?"

"So he did, sir. 'Twas the talk in the kitchen—and in the village," said Barbara. "It was the thought of the wrong he had done Master George, made Sir Michael cold to him. Mr. George was not like him—quiet like—always over his books. He was small and white—folks said he'd not live to manhood. I've a notion Sir Michael hoped he would not—and Sir Peter—it's my way to call him Sir Peter—it come familiar like,—was a lusty child—and more like a Latheby than Master George."

"I heard that my grandfather and Mr. Lasham drank more heavily after my grand-

mother's death. It was their conscience that smote them," groaned Mr. Latheby.

"That they did—and were thicker than before together. They played cards, too, and Master George, I see him still, looking up from his books to watch them—and Sir Michael 'ud say—with his loud laugh to the rector, 'George has got the cut of a parson—Eh ! Ned ?—he'd make a holier one than you.' That was his joke. Mr. George took everything natural-like. Sir Peter was treated better nor he. It was he always sat at Sir Michael's right hand, and was noticed by the guests—and 'twas when Mr. George was about eighteen."

"Yes," ejaculated Mr. Latheby, thrusting his hands through his hair, and swaying his body backwards and forwards ; "at college, my father was taunted with his illegitimacy."

"I remember that night, too," said Bar-

bara, tapping her knee with her withered hand ; "Mr. George was not expected home. I was standing in the hall. Sir Michael and the rector were over their wine, in the dining-room. The door opens, and out of the dark night comes Mr. George. I thought he looked like the angry ghost of himself—and he passes on without a nod, and goes straight into the dining-room."

"That's enough," said Mr. Latheby, instinctively putting up his hand. He remembered how a short time before his father's death, his father had recounted to him that interview. He saw before him again the pathos of the worn, furrowed face, as the dying man told of the feeling of degradation and isolation that had blighted his youth, when Sir Michael, doggedly refusing to be taken to account by his son, let him depart branded with illegitimacy. Next day the

young man enlisted as a private soldier ; later on he emigrated to Canada, and made a small fortune there.

“ That’s the truth—and if I fall down dead at your feet—for it—what I said—is the truth,” resumed Barbara, with fierce emphasis. “ That’s the story they’ve tried and tried to get out of me—but I’d not have said it ; and now the Towers are yours, sir. It puts you into your place. It makes you Sir Henry.”

“ Not yet ; but it’s the first step to it, and I’ll never forget I owe that first step to you, Mrs. Liston,” said Mr. Latheby, pressing the withered hand. Then it was settled that Barbara should come to live at the Dower House on leaving her farm.

When she rose, Mr. Latheby rose also. He escorted her to the garden-gate with the utmost politeness. He even gave her his

arm down the few steps in front of the house. Then he went in, rang the bell, and summoned his children. When they entered, he stared at Cecil in silence a moment or two, then he burst out :

"Do you know what that woman came to tell me? She came to tell me that my suspicions, that my convictions, were well founded. I tell you, sir, her mother was a witness to my grandmother's marriage. It was in the June before my father's birth. Barbara remembers the day. Her account had all the vividness of truth. It bears the stamp of it. At this present moment it is I who am legally master of the Towers."

Mr. Latheby had passed the stage when excitement is a sputter and a heart-beat. He had reached that when it gives cohesion and dignity. There was a certain pomposity in his manner.

To Cecil's and Mary's questions, he responded by giving Barbara's narrative. It lost none of its vividness by the insistence of Mr. Latheby's repetition. He brought to bear upon it the evidences of the ring and the letters.

"What an iniquitous story! What a cold-blooded case of disinheritance!" exclaimed Cecil, his face all aglow.

"Iniquitous! An unparalleled instance of cruelty and dastardly perseverance in wrong-doing," Mr. Latheby said, with vehemence.

"What steps do you mean to take to establish your claim, father? It ought to be established, and the blot removed for ever from our name," said Cecil, pacing up and down the room.

This assurance of being the legitimate descendant of that illustrious line of ancestors, and heir of the place endeared to him

by its heroic associations, awoke in him a sense of dazzling elation.

“Do! I’ll get back the old house, if I have to cart stones on the roads to earn the money necessary to prove my claim. I’ll do it. I’ll go up to London to-morrow, and get the first opinion. I’ll engage the ablest counsel. I’ll bring in a bill of ejectment against Mrs. Saville.”

“That is the course to take,” said Cecil, still under the overwhelming impression of those violated rights. Then he paused. “I think,” he resumed, with a slight deepening of colour, “that in beginning the lawsuit, it should be plainly stated, that we mean to make every just compensation to the Savilles should we win our case; and show that the sale of the property was illegal, by proving Sir Peter not the heir in tail. The Savilles paid their money down. I think it behoves

our honour that this should first be plainly stated."

"Compensation!" exclaimed Mr. Latheby, with cold surprise, his voice gathering volume as he proceeded. "By the Lord Harry! Talk to me of giving compensation! Ousted from my rights, enduring poverty, humiliation, till nigh verging upon old age. I've seen my father, sir, with a brand upon his name—an alien—repudiated by his kin—while his brother lorded it in the property that was legally his. Compensation! It is I should ask for arrears of compensation!"

As Mr. Latheby spoke, his face flushed; the veins of his forehead began to swell. Mary was alarmed and moved by these evidences of agitation. She touched Cecil's hand, and he said no more. Though the young man felt all the pride and exultation that was natural at a discovery

that cleared his name of a shadow which had long obscured it, yet with it came the fear that they were on the verge of committing some undefined injustice.

CHAPTER VII.

“Is that the law?”—*Merchant of Venice*.

FOR many a day after this, Fareham village was kept on the tip-toe of excitement. Mr. Latheby was watched taking the train up to London, on different occasions within a few weeks. Barbara was installed housekeeper at the Dower House. A strange gentleman from London was seen entering at the hall-door; it was known that he had spent the night there, and had returned to London by the first train next morning. He came again shortly. This time he had a companion, who looked uncommonly like his clerk. They had been examining the books in the church. There could no longer be

any doubt that Mr. Latheby was going to law.

There was a mystery, also, about Barbara. Two old cronies, who had taken tea with her in the housekeeper's room, described her living like one of the gentry. She wore a black silk dress, as thick as the doctor's wife on a Sunday at church; and her cap had real lace on it. She ordered about the servants. She had held her tongue about the family; but one of the old cronies vowed she had spoken of Mr. Latheby as "Sir Henry." She had heard it distinct with her own ears. Barbara had said "Sir Henry." It had slipped like from her. Another time some one had seen her walking about the garden, leaning on Mr. Latheby's arm. He kept bending his head and talking to her; just like young Mr. Smith to Miss Mary — his sweetheart. Then came a different account: some one had heard her

talking and muttering to herself behind the hedge. "She was tired of it. She wished she had been dumb, before she had spoken of it." And the butcher, who called at the Dower House for orders, had also heard her mumbling to herself, "A parcel of lawyers." Fareham decided that, notwithstanding the silk dress, and living like the gentry, Barbara's life had its clouds at the Dower House.

Fareham was right in its conjectures. Mr. Latheby had taken legal advice, and Barbara sometimes fretted against Mr. Latheby's paternal despotism. She lent herself graciously enough to some of its edicts. She took the best bit of the roast, and drank her glass of port with unquestioning submission. She accepted the *rôle* of lording it over the servants, living with them in a state of snuffy tiff, attaching immense importance to trifles, and letting

great matters go by. She sat down with complaisant importance in the easiest arm-chair, and told her story to the lawyers. Sometimes, however, when they kept her to the point, as she wandered off, she turned cross, folded her hands, twirled her thumb, and became deaf and dumb.

Like all paternal governments, Mr. Latheby's had its inconveniences. It hampered its subjects' liberty. Barbara was not allowed that second glass of hot gin she coveted at night. Her goings and comings were subjected to the state of the weather-cock. Mr. Latheby watched the quarter from which the wind blew, and when it came from the east, Barbara must remain in-doors. He watched the old woman as a fancier might watch the development of a black tulip. She was not allowed to see many people, lest it should fatigue her. Sometimes, Barbara made a feeble effort to break loose.

She would feverishly gather her belongings together, muttering to herself ; but Mr. Latheby always interrupted her, and overcame her by force of blandness and his cheery authority.

It was the opinion of Mr. Latheby's counsel, that if Barbara's story were true, the registry would yet be found ; his confident conviction being that the late rector would not have jeopardized his life by destroying the record ; although, to suit his purposes, he might have hidden it. It was probable, however, that, in the excitement of the moment, he had concealed it in some place his bemuddled brain could not remember after.

The lawyer enjoined that a strict search should be made through the library of the abbey church, and among the late rector's papers, should any be still in existence. He also ordered an affidavit of Barbara's

deposition to be taken before a magistrate.

The rector of Fareham allowed the search to be made through the registry notes, and the old volumes in the church library. It resulted in nothing, although there certainly was an odd appearance, bearing out Barbara's description, in that part of the registry book that ought to have contained the entry of Sir Michael's and Grace Steven's marriage. Mr. Lasham's nephew had inherited his uncle's library and papers. The search made among them was also fruitless. An inscription in one of the books, however, puzzled the lawyers. On the fly-leaf of a volume of Jeremy Taylor's works, there was carefully written in the late rector's usually sprawling hand, "*23rd June, 1790,*" "*100th Psalm.*" The lawyers made a careful note of this entry. Mr. Latheby's Counsel, Mr. Hinton, was a rising young barrister, self-

confident and eloquent. He had not yet made the name his friends expected him to make at the bar, and he was on the look out for a case likely to excite some interest, and give scope to his talents.

He accepted Mr. Latheby's brief. The trial was fixed for the spring sessions of the year following Barbara's revelation.

What pen could give an adequate description of the care, the fuss, the anguish of affected cheer with which Mr. Latheby surrounded Barbara on their journey up to London. He watched like a lover the shrunken figure, whose eyes, with a sort of angry brightness, wandered and settled on objects without any apparent recognition. Barbara had grown hazy on most points ; but she understood well enough she was going up to London, to tell of Mrs. Saville, and to set matters right. As the appreciation of the present faded, her mind fastened on the past.

The journey was accomplished in safety. Old Barbara was conveyed to lodgings, within easy reach of the court. A few mornings, however, before that fixed for the trial, she was off, out of reach of lawyers, and all the dealings and doings of earthly justice. Was it excitement? Was it over-petting that killed her?—or had the poor old wick burned itself out to its final flicker?

There was the affidavit, however; the record of the deposition that alone had made the paltry life precious. The trial took place. It attracted much attention. Mr. Hinton conducted the case ably. He made every point in favour of his client tell effectively. He related Barbara's story with dramatic realism, keeping the various characters, and their motives, well before the jury; building up the tale with careful attention to probability. If he could not prove

all he asserted, he invested it with a moral probability.

Mrs. Saville appeared in court. Her cross-examination simply went to prove that Sir Peter had sold the property at a lower rate than it ought to have fetched; and that Barbara Liston paid but a nominal rent for her farm. Her counsel denounced Mr. Latheby's and Barbara's attempt as conspiracy and collusion. The case went against the plaintiff. A doting old woman's story could not stand against the evidence of the existing marriage licence certificate.

Fareham was greatly excited. It was felt the village would be too small to hold the two great opponents. The Dower House would certainly be sold to help Mr. Latheby to pay the costs of the trial. All his fortune, it was said, had gone into lawyers' fees. Then the news reached Fareham that Mrs. Saville and Mr. Latheby were returning to

their respective homes. This report proved true, Mr. Latheby arriving some weeks before Mrs. Saville. He was received with tokens of sympathy by some of the neighbouring gentry. But soon Fareham's cup of gossip and speculation ran over. Mr. Cecil Latheby had accepted the post of music teacher in the Fareham academy for young ladies, kept by Miss Beales. It soon became the rage and the fashion in Fareham to get pianoforte lessons from the descendant of the old family. It may be that the manly mien and proud, handsome face, endorsing the history of the young professor, had more to do, especially in the case of the more romantic section of the community, with this sudden musical zeal, than the teacher's endowments. There was a subtle homage to him, in the ardour with which the Fareham young ladies practised, and in their new-born passion for music.

Cecil accepted his new duties with a cheery, unconscious pride. There was a lusty sense of life in being able to earn enough to keep the wolf from the door of the Dower House. It proved easier for him to do it than he had feared at first it might be. There was not only poverty; there were also debts to meet. The loss of the lawsuit had come with a sort of relief to him; for as it had proceeded, the cold-blooded ignoring of any right but the legal point at issue had deepened that indefinable feeling of being on the verge of committing a wrong.

It had been Cecil's wish to remain in London, and seek pupils there; but his father was bent upon returning to Fareham. Mr. Latheby remembered his counsel's opinion, that the registry was not destroyed; and he determined that if it could be found, it was his destiny to find it. Mr. Latheby steadily ignored the fact that his son gave

lessons. When Cecil first proposed turning his musical talent to account, Mr. Latheby frowned, and vowed he would not allow such degradation. Cecil persevered in his resolution, however; then he commanded that the subject, or any of its painful details, should never be mentioned in his presence. The shadow of poverty is pride. Mr. Latheby was bitter and wretched at first; and found difficulty in conforming to his altered circumstances; but he still kept up the old habits. He still called Mrs. Saville the publican's daughter; and he still wore the shabby shooting-jacket, with a more emphatic air of the country-gentleman.

Cecil never allowed Mary to lead him to the houses where he gave lessons. He often went alone. He could find his way with singular accuracy, after having visited a place two or three times. His usual guide was Jimmy Hillier, the old organist's half-

witted boy, a lad of twelve, who blew the bellows of the church organ, and who had a sort of dumb-animal devotion to Cecil.

There was a pathos and an interest in the sight of the handsome, stricken man in his strength and beauty, led along by a poor creature, who seemed a very gnome-like image of infirmity.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ This passeth yeer by yeer, and day by day,
Til it fel oones in a morwe of May
That Emelie, that fairer was to seene
Than is the lylie on hire stalke grene,
And fresscher than the May with floures newe—
For with the rose colour strof hire hewe,
I not which was the fayrere of hem two.”

The Knigh tes Tale.

MISS CLARA SAVILLE of the Towers had a strong sense of justice and a strong sense of proprietorship. It was the justice of youth untempered by mercy, and its egotism untainted by avarice. She appreciated her position of heiress of Latheby Towers. She valued and plumed herself upon it. She liked to climb to the top of the crenellated house, merely to feast her eyes on the stretching woods, the farm-houses nestling among

the orchards, the fertile pasture-land—and to tell herself these were her dependencies. There was one spot however,—a gabled cottage, standing in its own grounds,—that was a blot on the fair prospect.

Before resuming her history, after the lapse of those eleven years, let us pause and see the child grown a woman ; the same, and yet different — her character moulded by strange circumstances and scenes.

Miss Saville, however, was one of those who can travel from Dan to Beersheba, and return the same that she went. Hers was a surface that does not change. At twenty, she was still the undeveloped child of fourteen. She nursed her prejudices, her loves, and her hates. Her taste was questionable, but it was steadfast. She was loyal to her young fancies, absolutely uninfluenced by logic or argument. The young lady's intellectual qualities may not, perhaps, be

exalted, but she had a strong character, which has in it a subtle charm.

She had a contempt for what is commonly called the world, but it was a childish contempt, not to be respected or much noted here ; and her beliefs were as the child's in fairy tales. There was sometimes a girlish rudeness in her manner, which had a piquancy, but which never savoured of vulgarity ; it proceeded from a proud shyness, but when you came within the range of her sympathies, no one could be more gently familiar.

The attention of strangers she neither valued nor dwelt on ; but a kind word from one she loved was a diamond, over-valued, and over-treasured. Loving not more than one or two in the world, her jewel-case was almost empty ; yet she was amiable, and liked, or rather tolerated, many. To most people she was either indifferent or on the

defensive. Where she had an interest, she could be cunning ; a winning and native duplicity, in which there was no cruelty—no idle cruelty, we should say. Her toils were not the toils of vanity. She had always a motive—an end to gain,—and like the hound on the scent, she followed it with all her instinct, all her powers. She was also peculiarly and intensely secretive.

Miss Saville's face was one of those faces that always pass for pretty in a crowd, yet she was not generally deemed a ball-room beauty. It was a winsome, delightful face of the type Botticelli paints. Those weird gray eyes ! that splendid brown-gold hair ! and that innocent flavour of sensuousness on the lips, whose expression was that of gentle repose. Miss Saville's lithe, soft hand gave almost a pleasure to the touch—it grasped yours so cosily. Her pretty, rounded figure had an active grace in all its movements ;

the long limbs, you felt, could run and dance.

We spoke of those she loved ; they are not worthy of mention here. There was a schoolfellow she had not seen for years ; no one ever cared about her ; she was a most commonplace creature. There was her old nurse, O'Leary. There was a little dog about thirteen years old, who had grown, from the infirmities of age, an unpleasant companion in the drawing-room, and who lived in a stertorous condition, snoring the remnant of his life away. So much for her love. It was deep, and loyal, and grand,—out of all proportion to its objects. Now for her hates and prejudices.

There was one family, and especially one individual of it, in the neighbourhood, that she hated with a droll heartiness ; ridiculing, abusing, and sometimes denouncing.

It was immediately after that irritating

lawsuit about the Towers. The sore was open and festering in Clara, her mother, and their ally, Mrs. Saville's nephew; the young doctor, Frederick Raikes. Mrs. Saville was curt and fierce in her resentment; Miss Saville was sarcastic in hers.

"I met the old lunatic," she would say, speaking of Mr. Latheby, "and he actually had not on a strait waistcoat. He was going about like you and me;" or she would complain to Fred: "Those people are omnipresent. Wherever I go, I meet the lunatic or his son, the 'Young Pretender.' This morning I called at Miss Beales', and there was My Lord, the would-be heir of the Towers, teaching a chilblained Miss to thump 'Home, sweet Home,' upon the piano. In the afternoon, I go to the circulating library to change my volume, and I run across, yes, almost bump against, the impostor, emerging out of it. I have taught

Brownie to break into a trot when we pass the ‘Young Pretender’ on the road, with that hideous idiot boy for his guide. Why don’t his supporters subscribe to present him with a spaniel ?”

Her cousin, the doctor, had a great advantage in his entire sympathy and agreement with her views, and he made the most of it. It did seem an intolerable grievance that those people should be in the neighbourhood, going about everywhere, and keeping up a fictitious sympathy in their claim. Fareham was divided in its allegiance. There were plenty of houses where Miss Saville had opportunities to vent her indignation and scorn. The higher gentry went with the Lathebys. There was a strong *esprit de corps* in the old county families, and they had always been inclined to look frigidly down upon the brewer’s daughter. The late trial had brought into unpleasant contact

the antiquity of the Latheby stock and the mushroom growth of the Savilles.

When Miss Saville discovered this, her sense of justice was outraged. Not till then, for all her talk, had she taken any vindictive steps. Now, her first wish was to return to Paris and live there, but her mother would not budge. She was too much of an invalid to entertain much at the Towers ; but she sat in the old church pew on Sundays with the curtains drawn, staring down and facing the neighbourhood. Miss Saville now set to work, by every means in her power, to force the Lathebys out of Fareham. "If we could only oblige them to sell the Dower House, we would be rid of them," she said to Fred. She set up a rival music-master to Cecil, patronized him, and fought a crusade in his favour, amongst the Fareham young ladies. She succeeded in diverting the

allegiance of some of Cecil's pupils, and winning them over to this gentleman. She declared her intention never to visit a house where he was received. "It is moral blindness, not to see the right and wrong of the question. I'll never go to Miss Beales's house," she said to Fred, "for twice I found the 'Young Pretender,' had been kept to dinner. I've quarrelled for ever with that pompous old Solomon in petticoats, editing the Book of Platitudes, that is what she is. She vows it is manly, honourable pride, (here Miss Saville mimicked the slow, imposing utterance of the Directress of the Fareham Academy,) that makes this young man earn his bread, and gain an independence by the drudgery of teaching. Manly and honourable fiddlesticks!" went on Mistress Clara, fixing her bright eyes on her cousin; "when we know to what purpose he

would devote the money he earns—to carry on another lawsuit, to oust us out of this property! Miss Beales will have it, the impostor cares only to restore the fair fame of his ancestress! Fair fame indeed!" cried Miss Saville, more and more in a pet. "Much he would care for that if broad lands did not accrue to him after the work of whitewashing. A snug little family arrangement! As if any one who cared could not see through it; Sir Peter pockets mamma's money, and pays his wicked old debts with it. When the balance-sheet is cleared, comes My Lord Cecil, and says: 'You've paid your money to the wrong man, therefore it is as if no money had been paid at all. Not a penny of it shall you have back; pray vacate *my* house and *my* lands.' This is honourable pride, indeed! '*Toujours vaillant*' fights now-a-days with

a law-quibble for a sword!" It was to her cousin Fred, Clara usually poured out the tale of her grievance.

He was indeed "an obedient yeoman, who said 'Amen' to all that he was bid" by his cousin. He followed blindly and humbly the way she led. He had been her slave and her lover as long as he could remember. It would have been impossible for him, looking back on his life, to say when the boy's love had become the man's. It had reigned supreme over his life and its aims. Clara treated him with coquetry, and with that kind friendship he could not help repelling. She tyrannized over him. She sometimes made believe to make him her confidant. She made use of him. It was a fetch and carry sort of business; and Fred was only too glad to fetch and carry, and be made use of; giving up precious hours to procure a

ribbon or a fan of a certain hue or pattern, Mistress Clara had expressed a wish to possess. To listen to her complaints about the Lathebys, and sympathize with her, was a splendid opportunity of ingratiating himself that he could not let go.

He was a pale, slight, sandy-haired young man, five years her senior. He had a craze for the medical profession from his youth up; having numerous hobbies and theories on the subject. He had studied and worked in Paris and in the London hospitals, as though he had not a penny in the world. When he came to Fareham he took up the cause of the labourers, and was at this time working at sanitary reforms in their dwellings, a course that drew on him the farmers' reprobation. He did not live at the Towers, but in a small brick house just outside the village. Mrs. Saville being an invalid and hypochondriac, her mind ran on

ailments ; she would rather administer a pill than a blanket, and discuss the symptoms of an illness than the state of a cottage-roof. It was one of her charities to set up a dispensary for her poor tenants ; Fred undertook the management of it. Mrs. Saville was at first horror-stricken at the notion of Fred turning country doctor. It was horribly derogatory ; but he managed to carry his point, and won from his aunt a half-negative assent to his plan. His patients were numerous, but were not of the paying class. The young man, apart from that ardent, unhappy, bitter love for his cousin, that seemed so often to blur and paralyze his sense of right, had yet a dignified ideal of good, and in a few simple words often demolished mere worldly arguments. He was the only person that had ever found the way to Mrs. Saville's heart. He had laid his plans to win his aunt's love, and he

succeeded beyond his expectations. Mrs. Saville was for ever praising him, and vaunting his goodness and his cleverness to her daughter. She consulted him upon all subjects ; she treated him like a son ; for ever seeing in him a likeness to the son she had lost. It was a fond fancy of the mother, that if her boy had grown up, he would have been just like Fred. Mrs. Saville was often made the confidante of the love that filled her nephew's heart for her daughter. When, after pouring out his passion, Fred would exclaim he had no right to think of her, his aunt would put out her ivory yellow hand on his and say : " Why should you not think of her ? It is my dearest wish that you should think of her. That you should drop the name of Raikes and take that of Saville—it is your grandfather's. Who but you can fulfil his wish, to found a family, and perpetuate his name ? Who is so

worthy as you are to inherit this property, bought with his hard-earned money ? My dear, I know this is no reason in your eyes —it is in mine. She *shall* marry you."

CHAPTER IX.

"Out of time and place wisdom is folly."

Italian Proverb.

CECIL LATHEBY knew that Miss Saville wronged him ; that she was using her influence to deprive him of his pupils ; that she ascribed every low motive to him ; and denied him every honest quality. To be wronged by a beautiful woman has a subtle attraction for the heart of man. This young girl, so merciless in her persecution, became invested with a sort of interest to Cecil. He knew there were grounds that he should be the very centre of her educated prejudice. It became his desire to meet her. He thought an honest straightforward appeal to

her sense of justice might move her, perhaps convince her of injustice ; and by overcoming her prejudice, enable him to set his position in its true light, without compromising his father.

As months went on, it became more and more important that this appeal to her should be made, as his pupils were dropping off, thus endangering the aim he had in view of paying off the debts that had been incurred. Without taking even Mary into his confidence, he consulted Miss Beales, the directress of the Fareham Academy for young ladies, on the possibility of meeting Miss Saville.

Miss Beales had been the first to start him in the career of musical teacher. She had an hereditary respect for the Latheby family. Her grandfather had been the medical adviser of Sir Montagu's father, Sir Cecil. Her father had once dined with Sir

Montagu. She herself had once danced with Sir Peter. She told anecdotes of the Lathebys by the score, in the sonorous English she affected. Her veneration and attachment went with the old family ; but Miss Beales never allowed her sympathies to run away with her. She had a store of maxims, which she delivered in the voice of wisdom itself, concerning the conduct of human beings, that might have furnished exemplary copy-book headings, but that utterly ignored the complexities of character, circumstance, and temperament.

This admirable woman had taught Miss Saville history and the use of the globes. She never compromised herself by an opinion on the claims of the rival families. It was her habit always solemnly to postpone to the great day when no secrets shall be hid, the clearing up of every mystery. Like Justice holding the scales, Miss Beales con-

tented herself with weighing the merits of ancestry against those of hardly-earned wealth. She believed that by a little skilful manipulation the belligerent parties might be reconciled. She had endeavoured to manipulate Clara by loudly praising Cecil. The result had not been successful; a coolness had ensued between the directress and her late pupil. When the young man consulted her on the possibility of procuring for him an interview with Miss Saville, Miss Beales, with stately assurance, undertook to bring it about. Her plan of action was soon matured. She would ignore the existing coolness; she would invite Miss Saville to a little social gathering before the school broke up for the Easter holidays. She would word her note in such wise as to make it impossible for Miss Saville to refuse. On the appointed day she would direct the servant to show Miss Saville into the inner parlour,

where she would be sitting alone. By a few well-chosen phrases, without disclosing her purpose, she would prepare her visitor's mind to charity and forgiveness of enemies, and at the ripe moment of edification she would go out and lead in Cecil Latheby, waiting meanwhile in the school-room. Miss Beales beheld in anticipation the scene of reconciliation. Her heart swelled at the thought of it. She had already composed the appropriate peroration with which she would wind up the scene. This was Miss Beales's scheme confided to her admiring sister, Miss Maria. To Cecil, all that was communicated was an invitation to be at the school half an hour before the entertainment began. Clara received the following note :—

“ MY DEAR CLARA,

“ The ties binding teacher and pupil *are too sacred to be sundered*. Other social relationships can be *daily formed* and

lightly broken, but the *solemn* one, between the *tiller* of the spiritual and intellectual vineyard, and the *virgin soil thus tilled*, *must for ever subsist*. I therefore still venture to call you by the name given to you at the font by your sponsors, and which I used towards you in childhood.

“ We are having, on Wednesday next, the 16th instant, an innocent entertainment before the school breaks up for the holidays. My sister and I hope that you will give us the happiness of forming one of our party. Some of our young pupils have been preparing *tableaux vivants*, representing scenes from that edifying allegory, John Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress.’ ”

“ Believe me, my dear Clara,

“ Your sincere and affectionate friend,

“ SOPHIA BEALES.”

“ Good, pompous, four-syllabled old soul ! said Clara on receiving this missive. I had better go. She is not likely to speak of the

'Young Pretender' to me again. I had better accept the olive branch she is offering for Auld Lang Syne's sake." So she sat down and wrote a note accepting her old teacher's invitation.

On the appointed day she put on the prettiest dress the occasion would allow, and she set off in the big yellow coach, drawn by the two fat horses, her mother used to pay state visits in. Miss Saville would a thousand times rather have walked, but she thought the *éclat* of the equipage, drawn up at the door of the academy, would give Miss Beales pleasure.

As it rumbled up to the gate, the windows filled with a score of young heads, eager to watch the alighting of the heiress of the Towers; but the majestic countenance of the directress herself was not amongst the spectators.

Flustered Miss Maria received Miss

Saville, and conducted her to her sister's private sitting-room.

"What awful ceremony of greeting awaits me?" said Clara to herself, as she followed Miss Maria, who discreetly retired on opening the door of the sanc-tum.

Miss Beales was sitting alone, in her finest cap and gown. Her movements were more deliberate than usual.

"My dear child!" she said, with the slow utterance befitting a law-giver, "Thank you for coming."

"It is a pleasure," said Clara, kissing the old lady.

"My child," resumed Miss Beales, folding her hands, "not only is it for the heart-felt satisfaction of seeing you once more resum-ing your old place amongst our pupils, that I have asked you to come to-day; it is especially to effect a good work—it would

be more correct to say, a righteous deed,—through your agency."

"Whatever I can do I shall only be too glad to do," said Clara, remembering, with some annoyance, that she had not taken her purse.

"It is a great opportunity for good I am now presenting to you. Remember the pleasures of youth and wealth and station that are yours so lavishly, will pale before the higher pleasures of accomplishing an honourable deed. My dear," went on the old lady, laying a hand upon Clara's, and forgetting to be pompous in her emotion, "I am a poor woman, but I have not lacked opportunities to benefit my fellows, and looking back on my life, my best joys have come from so doing."

"I am sure the good work you want me to help you in needs no preamble to recommend it; only tell me what it is," said Clara, gently.

"Wait here, my dear, and you shall know it."

"*Tant de bruit pour une omelette.* For it is sure to be only an *omelette*," said Clara to herself, putting one pretty foot closer to the fire. "Is it a subscription for the mothers' meeting, or for the missionaries who face the dangers of being eaten alive, or for presenting a silver teapot to our retiring curate? For whatever object it be I shall put down a fat sum to rejoice her kind old heart."

Presently was heard the rustle of Miss Beales's skirt. The door opened; Clara turned. Towering above the directress' cap was the blind face of Mr. Cecil Latheby.

"What does this mean?" said Clara, rising and flushing with indignation.

"Reconciliation," began Miss Beales.

"I wished for an opportunity to meet you, and to speak to you, Miss Saville, and Miss

Beales has kindly furnished me with it," said Cecil, slowly, stepping forward.

"And I, sir, wish for no such opportunity; I refuse to hear you, and to speak to you," replied Clara, impetuously.

"There is that which I must say to you, Miss Saville. There are some questions I think I have a right to ask you, and a right to expect an answer to," he said, with courteous insistence.

"I deny your right to ask me any questions, and I refuse to hold any communications with you," replied Clara, walking about the room. "Was this, then, a trap?" she went on, advancing some paces towards the door. "Allow me to pass. You are standing before the door."

"It is because I know there is reason for your bitterness," resumed Cecil, with the lagging of suppressed emotion in his voice, quickly passing his hand over his brow, "and

because you are a woman, that I venture to appeal to you, Miss Saville, and even now to disobey your command to let you pass without hearing me. Pray, hear me, Miss Saville. I know," he went on, coming straight to the point with firm gentleness, "you seek in every way to impede and thwart my endeavours to follow out an honourable career—the only one that is open to me. You seek in all quarters to undermine my reputation; you speak of me as an impostor; you sneer at my capabilities as a music teacher—your whole mind seems bent on the one determination, to render unendurable my residence in Fareham."

"And what if it were?" said Clara, with scornful brevity.

"Have you ever thought, Miss Saville, that you do not know me?" asked Cecil, after a pause. "That you may be under an

utter misapprehension concerning me. Let that pass, however. Ask yourself, Is it generous for one having so much influence to use it to ruin another who is now dependent on his efforts for a livelihood? Is it just?"

"Just!" exclaimed Clara. "Just!" she repeated with a little gasp. "Hear, who talks of justice! Indeed, Mr. Latheby," she went on, with desperate reticence, "we had better end this discussion. You and I should never agree in our ideas of justice."

"Perhaps we might agree better than you think. Again, I say, you may misjudge me, Miss Saville!" said Cecil.

"Misjudge you! Good heavens! when the facts are so patent that whoso runs may read!" Clara burst out at last, standing before Cecil, and extending her hand with a vivid gesture. "Why, this disgraceful

trial?—where my mother, a widowed lady and an invalid, is called into court—exposed to the vulgar questions of a cold-blooded barrister? A trial got up, to oust her from property she honourably bought and paid for. To ruin her, by the help of a law-quibble to effect this. Coldly to accuse of a crime on no better grounds than a vindictive doting woman's tale, two dead defenceless men; one your ancestor, the other a clergyman. I cannot speak of it. The wonder is, Mr. Latheby, any honourable man or woman could be the dupe of such proceedings."

"You are unjust. That is enough, Miss Saville. After this, there is nothing more to be said," replied Cecil, pale to the lips. He bowed slightly and moved away.

Clara swept past him out of the room, holding her head high, and taking no notice of Miss Beales.

A minute after, Miss Saville had entered the yellow coach, and was rolling home, to the astonishment of the score of young heads at the windows.

Mrs. Saville's indignation was fiercer than her daughter's, on hearing the account of the interview forced upon her by Miss Beales. Fred joined heartily in the ladies' anger. Clara, as usual, found him a willing hearer. She gave him a half-indignant, half-comic account of Miss Beales's behaviour.

"I shall never put my foot inside that stuffy parlour," she cried.

"‘Will you come into my parlour,
Said the spider to the fly;’

and I, silly fly, walked in without suspicion. If you had seen her, Fred, armed *cap-a-pie* for the occasion, with a head-gear like a helmet—Minerva in all her panoply. If you had heard the sonorous platitudes, with which she prepared the way to meekness;

then actually going out and returning, leading in that monster."

After that the recital became all indignation.

CHAPTER X.

“ Of her to others 'tis my pride
To breathe the willing song;
But love o'erwhelms me by her side,
And checks my trembling tongue.

Guy of Uzes.

ONE morning early in May, as Mrs. Saville was walking about the grounds in the sunshine, wrapped in furs and leaning on Fred's arm—the poor lady adopted all the ways of an invalid—as usual the young man was pouring out to her the story of that intense, overmastering love of his; at last he declared his intention to put his fate to the test that very day.

“ Put it off a little longer, my dear; put it off—wait,” advised Mrs. Saville.

“ I cannot,” said Fred.

“ Put it off. Take my advice. We will

continue to work together upon her mind. There is so much in your favour, Fred. You are good-looking, you are clever—above all, you are linked by so many ties of interest and sympathy. But put it off a little longer."

"I cannot put it off," replied Fred, feverishly. "I've been here six months. I have had the field all to myself. She knows my love; she knows your wishes, aunt. The suspense unmans me; I cannot work."

"She will be your wife!" said Mrs. Saville, with imperious brevity. Fred trembled at the answer, and in silence pressed the thin hand on his arm. "But you will not win her by love-rhapsodies," continued Mrs. Saville. "I know Clara. She is wilful, inconsiderate. She is like her father; but more high-spirited. She has a sense of justice; yet she is full of prejudices. You

can curb her, if you work upon them. Don't forget it. Her strength is her weakness. Your raptures will only tire her. Work upon her antipathies to the Lathebys. Dwell upon your common grandfather's ambition to found a family. Pass before her imagination your schemes to make that name honoured and brilliant. Speak fearlessly. I wish you to be my heir. This property is mine. I might make you heir to it, without injustice to Clara."

"I only care to have it for her sake," said Fred.

"I shall say nothing of what I mean to do," answered Mrs. Saville, with that odd glance that made her look like her father.

"I shall speak to Clara to-day," said Fred, his voice trembling a little. I promise you, I shall say the best for myself I can. One thing," he added, after a minute's silence,

"I think I can rely on — she is heart-free?"

"Of course she is."

"I shall try my luck to-day. I shall throw the die on which my fate depends to-day; and I shall abide by the result of my throw."

"God bless you, Fred. May it prosper! You have been like a son to me. If my boy had lived, he could not have been a tenderer, better son. But remember, if she refuses, I can insist. Only wait, and try again and again."

That afternoon Clara was setting off for a long walk, to pay a visit at a house on the other side of the glen. When her mother did not need her presence in the carriage, she always walked. She had a gypsy love of fresh air. She could walk hours without fatigue. In Fareham, she dispensed with the escort of a servant in her pedestrian

excursions. Accompanied by Bruno, her big St. Bernard, she tramped fearlessly over the moor and in the woods.

Fred stood at the hall-door as she came down, his hat in his hand, and opened it for her.

"May I accompany you?" he asked.

"Of course, if you like," she said, with a look of surprise; "you don't always ask leave."

He put on his hat. They crossed the lawn. He opened the gate for her, still without speaking.

Clara looked at him; then she burst into a little fit of laughter—"Come, Fred, what is the matter? You look stuffed from head to heel with some secret. You have the air of a diplomatist, weaving a plot that is to change the whole map of Europe."

He smiled a little, but he did not answer. He found it difficult to approach the subject

that filled his heart to overflowing. Presently they entered the wood. Clara was by this time apparently unconscious of his abstraction. What she did not sympathize with she always utterly ignored. She walked briskly by his side. She had passed Cecil this morning, and she was in one of her moods of droll and hearty abuse of the young music-master.

When they were deep in the glen, Fred interrupted her by saying : "Clara, I asked you to walk with me, because there is something I ought to say to you." He spoke quietly, but there was a certain thinness in his voice. She looked up and saw that he was very pale.

"What is it ?" she asked ; then she added quickly, in an aggrieved tone—"Oh ! Fred, I know what it is. Don't say it, please. You ought not to have asked me to walk out with you, if you wanted to say it."

"But I must say it," said Fred, a sudden flush replacing the pallor of a minute ago. There was even a little anger in his voice. "I know that you know it. You know that I love you—that I have loved you ever since I was a small lad—that ever since I can remember you have had my heart."

"Yes, I know it," said Clara, gently.

"And, do you think for the sake of that great love, you can ever love me a little?" asked Fred, in faltering accents.

"No, I am sure I cannot," she answered, the words escaping her with straightforward bluntness. There was a pause—a pause that appeared to her a great blank of pain. Then she began in vexed tones, that had yet a wily gentleness in them: "Why do you want matters altered between us? We are very comfortable as we are. I don't want to marry. Perhaps I shall never want to marry. I like you better than any man I

ever met. I think sometimes I am quite fond of you ; if you would only let me alone. I know mamma loves you a million times more than she loves me, and I am not jealous, because I know you are so good."

"She wishes our marriage," said Fred, with remote hope in his voice.

"Yes, indeed, I know she does," said Clara ; "I have been almost angry with you for knowing it so well. Do you know, Doctor Wiseacre, I have often felt very weary hearing of your goodness and your cleverness ? I might have cared for you a little if any one had picked holes in you—had found one refreshing, delightful, little bit of evil in you—and what is more, Mr. Fred," she added, turning her bright eyes full upon him, "do you know, I know you might be the heir ? It is of you I ought to be afraid ; not of the poor 'Young Pretender' we hate, and who has no chance."

“Afraid! when you know the only reason I would care to be the heir, would be to make the property valuable and beautiful for you,” answered Fred fervently.

“I am sure of it,” she said, with frank heartiness; “you are a thousand times better than I am; you ought to have for wife a girl a thousand times better too; who would give out drugs to the poor; and who would never get into a blundering state of rage and indignation when the world wronged her.”

“I want no other wife but you, Clara—as you are—not different in soul or body,” he answered, passionately. “You say,” he continued, after a pause, talking with forced deliberation, “that you like me better than any man you know. You see, if we married, I should take the name of Saville; that was our common grandfather’s.

It would be strengthening the family tree at its very root."

"It would do that certainly," said Clara.

"It would be my ambition to make the name loved and honoured. This could not be expected of a stranger who had no exact right to it."

"There is reason in what you say, Mr. Fred," she agreed.

"For your sake, Clara," he continued, "for love of you, I would have but one ambition—one aim in life—to make the name of Saville dear to Fareham. I would to the full extent of my ability—I have cause to do it—endeavour to be thought something of in the world. We don't win spurs and titles now-a-days on battlefields as they used in the old times; but there are other fields—that of science, for instance—in which a man may hope to win an hon-

ourable reputation ; and perhaps I might do that."

"I should like that," said Clara. "I should like our name to put that of Latheby into the shade—to snuff it out. We shall call the Towers 'Saville Towers,' Fred."

"We will," said Fred, trembling in every limb at that blessed use of the pronoun "we."

"But nothing is decided yet. I have not bound myself," said Clara, turning with something like fierceness on him, for the elation in his tone jarred upon her. "You need not look so miserable, Fred. Look here," she went on, counting on her fingers and talking lightly, yet with a little metallic ring in her voice. "This is May ; in January I shall be of age. For those eight months I want to be free. Free, you understand, sir, without even the thought of marriage hanging over me. When I am twenty-one it will

be quite time enough to think of marriage—and of being miserable."

"Miserable!" repeated Fred, then he paused. He felt he ought to say to her, that if there were anything like misery to her, in the thought of marriage with him, to put it out of her mind. But his lips refused to say the words. He could not say them; he loved her with that egotism of passion which conceives but one desire, come what might, to have her. He could see nothing beyond.

"I shall so love and worship you, Clara"—he began, and then broke down.

"Well, Fred, the chances are we shall marry. I dare say I shall never care for a man more than for you. I do not think I shall ever be in love; and yet," she said, checking herself, and then speaking with an unwonted softness, "I think I might. I fancy it would be with one who would not have

much to recommend him in the world's eye. He might be poor, ugly, full of faults, yet there would be that in him that would compel me to love him in the face of expediency, of reason itself. He must never be my slave. You are my abject slave, Fred. I could never sway him from his notions of right ; and yet he should be dependent upon me for his happiness—helplessly dependent. You, Mr. Fred, have a whole world of science to explore and find happiness in, a world I cannot even approach. But such a man I shall never meet," she went on, resuming her brisk tones ; "and ambition gives a wholesome zest to life. It is my ambition to overshadow the name of Latheby by that of Saville in Fareham."

They had now come to the limit of the glen. The village where Fred was going to lay beyond them, peaceful and lazy in the sunshiny afternoon.

Fred took Clara's hand, and held it, looking down on the winsome face that had so much character, and yet was moulded in such delicate lines and curves. Ah! why did he love with that intensity of love? She did not love him; she did not know what love was. She had spoken of love as a child might speak of it after reading a fairy tale; yet her intuitions of it were generous and devoted. Could he ever compel the little feeble, cousinly affection she gave him to become the strong attachment her heart was capable of bestowing?

"Above all things, Fred, don't look sentimental," said Clara, impatiently, withdrawing her hand. "For eight months I must not only be free, but I must not have the thought of my freedom disturbed. You are not to hold my hand, or look at me as if you had never seen me before. I shall not be made love to, do you understand, not

even by looks. Now don't put on a dejected countenance ; we'll be married time enough, if it is to be. Now good-bye ; " and calling Bruno she turned away.

For a minute or two he remained where he was, looking after her as she went along through the trees, followed by her dog. The very atmosphere seemed to him to radiate as she passed through it, tinged by her tender grace and beauty. Then he turned and went his way ; and as he went down the village he thought of the delight of forcing her love to come. She had given him a hope, almost a promise, that it would be his right, nay, his duty, by every artifice, by every care, to nourish and compel that love.

CHAPTER XI.

"The hair of the hours was not white,
Nor the raiment of time overworn,
When a wonder, a world's delight,
A perilous goddess was born."—*Swinburne*.

MISS SAVILLE now went to make a call on the wife of an artist, who had lately settled in the place. Mrs. Welsham knew and appreciated the honour of being called upon by the young lady of the Towers; she guessed also the advantage of her patronage to her husband. She was a fair, mild woman, difficult to characterize, except by saying that she had a tribe of children, and an inexhaustible admiration for her husband, and all his works.

Mr. Welsham was out, but his pictures were in, and so were the children. After

some up-hill conversation with the mistress of the house, Miss Saville asked to be allowed to see the studio, and the young folk. The pictures were the type of the ambitious common-place. After having politely admired them, Miss Saville admired the children who had flocked in. They were a large brood, unaccustomed to restraint as young goslings in a farm-yard. After a little notice from Miss Saville, they began to prattle around her.

“Which of you is beginning to play the harmonium?” asked Clara, seeing a harmonium in a corner of the studio.

“We don’t play it; Mr. Latheby plays it,” cried a chorus.

“Mr. Latheby!” exclaimed Clara.

“Yes; Mr. Latheby who has got no eyes. That is, he has got eyes, but he does not see with them,” explained Neville, the eldest boy.

"I did not know Mr. Latheby was a friend of yours," said Clara, in vexed tones, to their mother.

"We know him slightly," replied poor Mrs. Welsham, who remembered but too well the feud between the family at the Towers and the Lathebys.

"Yes; he's a great friend of papa's," shouted a trio.

Then Neville, the spokesman, went on: "He often comes to have a smoke with papa. That's his chair you're sitting on."

"Oh, hush! you naughty, badly brought up children," cried Mrs. Welsham, all in a flurry. "We've only known Mr. Latheby a short time," she explained to Clara.

"You have only been here a short time," said Miss Saville, curtly.

"My husband had a letter of introduction to Mr. Latheby, and he is so fond of music," replied the poor lady, mildly.

"Papa says he's the best and handsomest man he knows, and he's painting his picture. I'll go look for it to show you. It's that big canvas with its face to the wall," cried Neville again.

"I don't want to see it on any account," said Clara. "I must go now. Good-bye, Mrs. Welsham. I had no idea Mr. Latheby was a friend of Mr. Welsham, or to tell you the truth, I would not have called. I do not care to run any chance of meeting him."

"I wish I had not allowed the children up," plaintively moaned Mrs. Welsham. "I assure you, Miss Saville, they have exaggerated the friendship."

"They seem fond of him. I am sorry for it. It is a pity that for the sake of very mediocre-music, they should be placed under the influence of one so utterly unprincipled."

Having said this Miss Saville took her departure.

Clara did not return home the way she and Fred had come. She struck right into the wood, that extended at the back of the glen, choosing the shy paths that meandered through the trees. She liked the solitude of it. She wished to walk off the sense of jar and irritation caused by the little episode at the Welshams.

Fred's proposal of marriage had not at all agitated her. She had long known it would come some day. Hitherto she had always avoided any approach to the subject; but she knew her mother's wishes, and the advantages of the match. She had never faced her own feelings, or asked herself any questions on the matter. She had allowed herself to drift and vaguely to accept the situation made for her; feeling it was not an emergency, but a contingency, of the future. The

annoyance caused by her visit now rendered her passive to the arrangement of marrying Fred. When the time came, she concluded, she would accept him. As she said this to herself, there came also a little feeling of hope that he would not prove a troublesome lover.

It was a late afternoon, early in May; and it was inviting to walk in the wood, radiant in the dainty glamour and lustihood of spring. The beauty of the day soon began to exercise a tuneful effect upon Clara. A hope seemed stirring through the perfumed aisles of the wood, like the verse of some immortal poet, shaking a light of promise over the page. The sky was blue behind the delicate tracery of young-leaved trees, and the rosy brown of the budding oaks. The glinting sunlight fell athwart the white trunks of the beeches and birches, in patches of inestimable brightness. Here and there, a sonorous-toned

fir came as a bass note in the jocund melody of light and colour.

Clara soon cast off her cares. Every other sense was absorbed in the physical delight of tramping along over the full-bladed grass, over last year's dead leaves, and through the ferns, in the mild May breeze. Her practical temperament made her as unconscious as a thrush or a kid might be of the effect of the day upon her; yet her young pulses were beating in unison with those stirring through the leafy woods. She was imbibing through every pore the blithe hubbub of bird and insect life; the surrounding sense of sprouting buds; of sap rising in the trees; and in the sod over which the tender light lay brooding. She took off her gloves to feel the wind on her hands. She had not taken note of how far she had wandered, until the passage from the brightness of vivid greenness to the twilight of a serried grove of trees

affected her unpleasantly. She found she had wandered to the river's side. It ran deep and swift below, between steep banks ; there came a faint sucking sound of the water through the rushes. She was standing by the spot known in Fareham *as* the "Dead Man's Pool." Within late years, an added horror had invested the place ; the wife of Simeon Hillier, the organist of the church, in a fit of delirium, immediately after the birth of Jimmy, had stolen out of the house, rushed madly here, and thrown herself into the water. The body had been rescued. Her half-witted boy might still often be seen haunting the place. There was a pathos in meeting the poor lad, playing with feathers and stones, just over the place where his mother died.

Clara turned away hurriedly with a shiver. She was preparing to regain the more direct way home ; and was looking about her to

decide on the best path to take, when the growl of her dog made her aware that she was not alone.

A man was slowly walking towards her. When she first perceived him, he was at a short distance, but partly concealed by the intervening trees. Miss Saville called Bruno, and laid her hand on his collar, and watched the figure slowly coming forward through the shady aisles, across which the sun slipped shafts of golden light. The man's hands were outstretched, feeling the trunks on either side. His head was thrown back. He looked towards the sun ; on his face there was a hesitating expression. It was Cecil Latheby.

Clara felt as if a toad had suddenly appeared across her path. She turned away quickly, still holding Bruno by the collar.

“ Intolerable ! ” she muttered to herself. “ To meet him everywhere ! Even in the

depths of the wood, where I should have thought his blindness would have protected me from him!"

She walked on rapidly; then suddenly she paused, and turned to watch for a minute the tall, broad-shouldered man, groping his way along, with outstretched hands. "Of course, he has lost his way! I wish he never found it again. Fareham would be well rid of him," she said, and resumed her path. Soon, however, she paused again and looked. Then she turned back.

"It's intolerable to be always meeting him. Why does he haunt me?" she said angrily; then again she hesitated, and again stopped; then turned back again and walked resolutely away. The blind man had changed his course, and was now making direct for the river. She had not walked many yards when once more she turned. This time she made some steps in Cecil's direction;

then she turned desperately on her footsteps, "Let him!" she muttered. Yet she could not help once more stopping to watch. She saw the piteous, perplexed look on his face as he approached, unconscious of his danger. A few steps would bring him to the spot. She turned and walked swiftly away. Suddenly she paused, wheeled round, and in a ringing voice cried, "Stop!" He stopped and she walked determinedly toward him.

She paused a few paces from him. At the sound of her approaching footsteps he turned toward her. Her brow was ruffled, and a slight angry flush was on her cheek. The usual repose of his face was unbroken.

"You know you are approaching the river?" she said abruptly.

"I heard it," he answered.

"You are going right into the wood; quite away from the town," she said, stripping

her tones of every unnecessary softening modulation.

A slight pallor and crispation of all his features told that he had recognized her voice. Cecil lifted his hat. "I have been uncomfortably aware of it, this last half-hour. My vanity has led me into this scrape. I thought I knew my way too well to lose it," he said.

"If I walk before you, will that suffice to guide you?—or would you prefer holding my dog's collar?" asked Clara in the same uncompromising voice.

"Thank you; I would prefer the guidance of your footsteps," he answered.

They walked on in silence; she going before, he following. Occasionally she would turn to say, in the same abrupt voice: "There's a root in your way;" or, "Stoop; there's an overhanging branch." Sometimes she would stop to clear his path of some

intruding clump of heather or fern ; and in spite of herself a little zeal sprang up in the enforced duty.

Presently she found that, in her confusion, she had missed the direct way to the glen. She had got into a wild undergrowth of heather. Cecil followed her with difficulty. Sometimes he stumbled.

“ You had better take my hand,” she said at last brusquely. She had forgotten that she had taken off her gloves ; but at the touch of Cecil’s fingers on her bare palm she winced a little, still she left her hand in his clasp until the obstacle in the way was passed.

By this time she remembered a short cut across. The way was rough, and again and again their hands met. After a while Clara became conscious that she was growing calm. Those sensitive fingers seemed communicating a strange quiet to her. A virtue

seemed to emanate from them; a spell of repose and dignity.

She became conscious also that through her mortification and anger there was struggling in her a feeling akin to compassion. She was moved by the sight of power, stricken and trammelled. She could not help feeling pity for this strong man that she was leading, dependent upon her guidance as a child.

"You ought not to go out alone," she said at last, in a vaguely softened voice.

"Every man wishes to be alone sometimes," said Cecil. "I think a music-master, more than any man, needs solitude occasionally, to take the jingle of scales off his brain."

"Yes, indeed," she answered.

"Then, as I said just now, my vanity has led me into this," said Cecil, in a voice whose balanced calm betrayed an effort to be so. "I took the path I always follow through

the wood. Every accident and irregularity in the soil are familiar to me. My mind was disturbed, and I left it unconsciously, and but too surely lost myself."

"If you wish so much to be alone, why don't you take a dog?" asked Clara.

"A dog cannot be brought to every house," said Cecil, gently. "And to tell you the truth, Miss Saville, I once had a dog"—he went on speaking like one unwilling to allow awkward pauses of silence—"a Newfoundland, with shaggy sides, and a head like a young lion. His name was Ghost. He trotted by my side for thirteen years. He was a sort of friend—an humble, but a sincere friend. I think he understood all my words, for he brightened or saddened according to them. When I was unhappy, I felt his nose stuck into my hand in unobtrusive sympathy. When I was glad, the trot of his feet told me he knew it. When

I wished to be alone, he had a way of effacing himself, yet he was by me at my first sign. It may be sentimental, Miss Saville, but I have not the heart to replace Ghost by a stranger."

"No, I don't think it sentimental," said Clara, relenting, yet still on the defensive.

"I think we are coming to the pathway; the trees are getting thinner," said Cecil.

"You are right," she answered.

When they reached the pathway, Cecil removed his hat.

"I have to thank you, Miss Saville, for an act of kindness—I should rather say, for an act of timely charity." Here he paused. "May I say something to you that I greatly wish to say—that I think I owe it to myself to say? You refused to listen to me some time ago; but, it is said, a kind action inclines the heart of the doer of it to greater kindness."

"What have you to say?" she asked, with returning stiffness. "I've done what I could not avoid doing. Don't you think we had better part?" Then observing the pained look on his face—"Well! I'll hear you!" she said.

"You see," said Cecil, speaking with difficulty, "there are positions in life it is next to impossible to work out of. I am deeply attached to my father. I owe him more than filial gratitude. My infirmity makes me dependent, and he has never failed me. Yet I owe it to myself to say that on one point he and I are cruelly at issue. I refer to the late lawsuit." He paused, then he resumed with restrained energy, yet with a falter of pleading in his voice—"I owe it to myself all the more to say it, because I am the cause of the course my father has taken. His affection for me has swayed him in it. He might have accepted for himself the loss

of the old place ; he could not submit to accept it for me. It was this made him shut his eyes to the fact that, if there was a wrong done, it was done by his grandfather and uncle. There it began and ended. The buyers of the estate were innocent of it. To seek to make them the sufferers was an unjust act—almost wicked.” Again Cecil paused. “The thought of that lawsuit tortures me with shame,” he resumed with energy, passing his hand over his moistening eyes. Clara saw that tear, but he did not see her looking. It was a seal of truth ; an evidence of it a woman could not repel. “I have longed to tell you, Miss Saville, that I separated myself from every attempt to get back the Towers, without every fair and just compensation being made. I do most earnestly wish that we might restore the honour and fair fame of the lady who was my ancestress. All traditions of her paint

her as pure and good. But with this ends all desire on my part to find the reputed registry of her marriage before my grandfather's birth. I may never, Miss Saville, be able to prove this assertion, yet I would have you believe that I disclaim all participation in the attempt to invalidate the legality of the sale of the estate. It has passed from us, and has been honourably acquired by others."

As Cecil spoke the usual repose on his face was broken by the drifting over it of strong emotion ; every feature seemed transfused by the light of feeling the silent eyes could no longer express.

Clara felt penetrated by a new sensation, the exact nature of which she could not explain. She was like one suddenly arrested in a headlong race, only giddily aware of the abrupt check. She stood silent, looking at Cecil, finding it impossible to say a word;

but as he remained waiting, she at last said :
“ Well, I have heard you.”

“ I have now to thank you for two acts of kindness,” he replied. “ Believe me, Miss Saville,” he added, with the latent impetuosity always ready to break out, “ I thank you more for the second than the first.”

He listened a minute, as if waiting for her to speak ; then he bowed and turned away.

“ Good-bye,” she said, very softly.

Miss Saville walked slowly home ; and as she went along her bright eyes seemed to be taking no note of outward objects.

CHAPTER XII.

“Nevermore,
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm.”

E. B. BROWNING, *Sonnets from the Portuguese.*

MISS SAVILLE returned home late. She had scarcely time to dress for dinner. When they sat down to table she was very talkative; described with droll vividness the Welsham household and the pictures, but she never mentioned her meeting with Cecil in the wood. It was evident she was flurried. She sometimes answered Fred and her mother in hap-hazard fashion; sometimes she let the talk drift and fall into

"Oh! Fred. What is it? You know you promised not to hold my hand, or to look at me," she said quickly. Then noticing the dismal expression of mortification spreading over his countenance, she repented of her pettishness—"Well, Fred, if it be a pleasure and a comfort to you to hold my hand, here it is. You may hold it for five minutes," she said, with mock-heartiness, stretching it out, and taking out her watch.

"You were feverish this evening, and I have a professional claim therefore," said Fred.

"You look professional! You have all the appearance of a doctor feeling my pulse," she replied, with a laugh.

He did not answer; but he put another hand over hers, and moved the ring on her slender finger.

"Tastes differ," said Clara, a little sense of tedium creeping over her. "I like an

honest shake-hands, but those clasps of hand lost in hand are very unmeaning to me."

"They are not unmeaning to me," he answered sentimentally, in a tone of pique. Dignity bade him loose her hand, yet he was loth to forego its touch of velvet.

"We won't quarrel about it. Three minutes more, Fred!" she said, looking down on her watch.

A little pause, during which Mrs. Saville's audible breathing in the back-ground played an accompaniment to the fluttering tick of the watch.

"Two minutes more," said Clara, in a business-like tone, not raising her eyes. There was a little demure lifting of the corners of the mouth.

The candles threw a light over the downy cheek, lighting up the pretty ear so delicately tinted and finished, and the dainty bit of neck just below it. A shimmer lay

on the coil of simply braided hair. Fred's eyes caressed all those dear details.

"One minute more," said Clara, glancing up with a gleam of raillery, yet feeling oppressed.

"I'll have it out, to the last tick," he answered, tightening the clasp of his two hands; then he lifted hers to his lips, and kissed it.

"That was not in the compact," she said, the sense of tedium deepening. She slipped her hand away, and replaced the watch in her waistband. "Come, Fred, we have had our dose of sentiment for to-night. Make yourself amusing; you are bound to do so now."

"I have nothing amusing to tell," he answered, disconcerted. "Mrs. Smith's rheumatics are very bad. Jonathan Beecher's broken collar-bone was showing signs of mending. There is a hole in Brown's roof."

"That is not exciting, certainly; yet I prefer the jingle of medicine bottles to the heaving of sighs," said Clara, beginning to play softly to keep her hand out of his grasp.

"As I walked home, I, as usual, of course, met one of the unavoidables," resumed Fred, in the confident tones of one who knows he is broaching a congenial topic.

"One of the Lathebys you mean; which of them?" she asked.

"The 'Young Pretender,' looking radiant and elate. He was walking briskly along. He looked as if he had turned us all out of the Towers, and was already in possession!"

"Indeed!" said Clara, quietly.

"I wonder what had happened. Perhaps *Toujours Vaillant* was returning from an interview with his solicitor. He seemed walking through dreams, or perhaps," Fred went on, as she did not answer, bent upon winning a smile from her, "it was only that

the pretended heir of Latheby Towers had found another pupil."

"Why do you say that?" she said with a flush. "You speak as if it were derogatory to a man to earn his livelihood by giving lessons."

"Well, as for the fact of young Latheby going out to teach, I suppose it is necessity compels him. I don't mean to impeach his conduct," replied Fred, astonishment spreading over his features.

"Do you know," she said, turning round on the music-stool to face him, and speaking quickly, "I heard from some one to-day—some one who ought to know, never mind who it was—that the son does not share his father's views in the matter of the lawsuit; that he was quite opposed to them all along; that he feels shame at the whole proceeding."

"I took for granted he shared them,"

replied Fred, amazement growing blander on his countenance.

"We may have been quite astray in our judgment of him. It may be a case where the sin of the father should not be visited on the son," said Clara, with animation.

"What is it? What is it?" exclaimed Mrs. Saville, rubbing her eyes, and sitting up.

"Nothing, mamma," answered Clara, quickly rising and going towards her mother, a big blush flitting to her brow. "I have been bullying Fred, as usual. I have been contradicting and finding fault with everything he says. Come, Mr. Wiseacre, worthy Doctor Factotum!" she went on gaily, eager to remove the impression her sudden partisanship of Cecil had made upon him; "gather up your wits. They are effectively scattered to the four corners of the room. Mamma is ready for the rubber, and you know Mr. Dummy is an irritable old

gentleman, who does not like to be kept waiting."

To say that Clara, after the meeting in the pine wood, there and then laid aside her old creed concerning Cecil, and took up a new one, would be to exaggerate. She could not herself have told if she accepted the explanation he had made to her or not. She was attracted and also repelled. She was confused, but certainly she was occupied by the thought of him. There had been a suddenness and a strangeness in the circumstances of their meeting that impressed her imagination. She had, as it were, crossed the gulf that separated them ; but as yet she did not know how they stood towards each other. She felt curious, suspicious, and ready to put forth all her cunning in watching him.

Miss Saville knew it would be easy enough to meet Cecil Latheby again. She

need only confide her wish to Miss Beales. Notwithstanding the failure of her late scheme, she knew the directress of the Fareham Academy would, with equanimity, again step forward to play the *rôle* of a pompous angel of reconciliation. But Clara would not appeal to Miss Beales. She would not allow to be emphasized and dragged into the noonday of publicity that stolen interest, whose attraction lay all in its secrecy.

With a quiet, deep, almost unconscious resolution—such as those women make who attain their ends—yet having no distinct object for it, Clara determined to meet Cecil again. She set about achieving her purpose in a feminine, indirect way, taking what stepping-stones were there—not interrupting any employment, not scheming upon her pillow. Instead of climbing a window, she raised the latch and opened the door.

Clara thought of the Welshams. Cecil often went to the studio. She had no sooner discovered a way of meeting him, than she began to doubt whether she would like to meet him. Sometimes she thought she would, sometimes she thought she would not; yet she felt impelled to let herself have a chance and opportunity to do so.

Her mother's birthday would be in a few weeks. Clara resolved to have a crayon portrait of herself taken by Mr. Welsham, as a birthday gift to her mother. "It will be doing a good turn as well;" she said to herself, with genuine kindness. "The poor man needs a commission. He will make a hideous, startling likeness of me. He has the fatal gift, I saw the other day, of making his sitters tremendously like, and as ugly as circumstances will allow. I shall hang up in chalky lights and charcoal shadows—a revelation to my friends how plain I really

am. But mamma will not care, and it will give Fred a peg to hang all sorts of pretty speeches on."

Two days after her meeting with Cecil, Miss Saville was on her way to the Welshams. Neither the painter nor his wife were at home; but the children were all in. At her request to see them, they trooped in; awkward, yet evidently bent upon making themselves agreeable.

She sat down amongst them, and began to talk to them. They were soon confiding all their little interests to her, and it was not difficult to lead up the conversation to Mr. Latheby, for he was an immense favourite with them. They told her Mr. Latheby always came on Thursdays. He had lessons in the neighbourhood. He came in to have a chat with their father, and play the harmonium to him. Their father described his pictures to Mr. Latheby, and

then Mr. Latheby played them on the harmonium. They called that "picture-music." Little Minnie was his favourite, because she was delicate. He played for her—"Girls and boys, come out to play," and "Nellie was a lady." The silly lad, Jimmy Hillier, came with him. He was so fond of Mr. Latheby he would not leave him, not even for an orange, or a new sixpence. The children were unwearied in their prattle about their favourite. Neville dilated on his pedestrian powers. He could beat their father at walking, and he could row and ride. Although he could not see, he could tell when there were clouds rising ever so far away, and when they came near a hedge or a wall, he felt it, he said; and he heard what nobody could hear till long after.

When they had exhausted all they had to say of their friend, they invited Clara to come and see his portrait, which happened

to be in the next room. It was now finished. Miss Saville accepted the offer, and rose with some alacrity. When she stood before the blind, painted face, a sudden shyness came over her. Although the colour was detestable and the shadows leaden, the painter had caught something of the expression of thoughtful repose and strength. He had also given to the apparently flawless eyes that glimmerless fixity that gave pathos and mystery to the face.

Clara was looking at it with an interest that for the moment made her unheeding of her surroundings, when a shout from the children announced the return of Mr. and Mrs. Welsham. Miss Saville was annoyed to be found looking at the portrait, so she was a little chilling in her greeting. She told the painter the object of her visit. Mr. Welsham offered to come to the Towers for the sittings, but Clara explained that the

portrait was to be a surprise ; and it would be necessary for her to come to the studio. Mr. Welsham's engagements were not numerous ; Miss Saville might choose her own days. She appointed to come twice weekly. She hesitated—then she fixed Tuesdays and Saturdays. "When he hears I am sitting, I wonder if he will change his day for coming," she said to herself, as she walked home. The experiment failed ; the first day she sat Cecil did not make his appearance at the studio. She did not mention his name to Mr. Welsham ; who, on his side, avoided all reference to him. As she walked home, Clara was conscious of a feeling of disappointment and of relief. "I am glad he did not come," she said to herself. "It would have been very awkward and disagreeable to have met him. I have heard all he had to say ; there is nothing more to be told."

But the next time, Miss Saville caught herself speculating, on her way, if Cecil Latheby would be likely to come in that day. "He might wish to meet me again. Although I listened to him, I did not say I believed him," she said to herself. Then she was annoyed with herself, and rebuked herself angrily for this continual reference to him in her thoughts. "I hope he may not come. Why should he?" and he did not come. Again she felt annoyed and relieved, and angry with herself for her disappointment. It was a yoke she must break from, this constant wondering about Cecil. Then there came a doubt she must solve—did he know that she came to the studio?

On the third sitting, she asked Mr. Welsham if any one had seen her portrait, or knew that he was painting it.

"Only one person knows of it; the only

person whose intellect and taste I care to please. My friend Latheby—" Here the painter stopped abruptly, coloured, and faltered : "I beg your pardon." He had forgotten the feud.

"He is blind ; his judgment is not very valuable," said Clara ; and she quickly turned the conversation. She had gained, however, the information she wanted to have—Cecil was aware of her coming.

Miss Saville showed great kindness to the Welshams. She had been right in her conjectures. They were very poor. They needed help. Until Miss Saville had her portrait taken, no one had given Mr. Welsham commissions. Cecil liked the painter's society, and had grown intimate with him.

The two men were bound by the common tie of poverty and love of art ; but Cecil had many a laugh, that the only commission he

could give his friend to paint was his blind face, and not a penny for it. Clara never asked any questions, yet she heard this from Mrs. Welsham, who had not her husband's reticence, and sometimes forgot the feud. Miss Saville now took matters into her own hands. She spoke of the Welshams' circumstances to Fred, who, to please her, bought the painter's picture of an English girl in classic costume, walking through a spinach-coloured grove of trees, with a Greek temple in the background. She also got some commissions for portraits for him in Fareham. Her natural warm-heartedness moved her to do all this, yet she was conscious there was a latent hope and a desire that Cecil should hear her well spoken of by the household.

Miss Saville made a fight against what had grown to be a habit—treated it as the idleness of her mind. She severely took herself to task, and endeavoured to discipline

her thoughts. She strove to build up her old dislike and contempt of the "Young Pretender." She would root out this stolen interest, this *Picciola* blossom growing up, and drawing to itself all her generous and pitiful instincts.

One day, the meeting she had looked for in a perplexity of hope and dread, took place. The portrait was considerably advanced. As she was sitting, the door opened, and Cecil, his hand upon Jimmy Hillier's shoulder, entered. Clara felt a queer spasm at her heart, and a burning rush of blood to her brow. She quickly jerked her chair back. Guided by the sound, Cecil turned to her, and made his bow. There was a manly confidence in his face and bearing as he addressed her.

"I heard Miss Saville was in the studio. I hope she will not look upon my entering it as an intrusion."

"I have done sitting for to-day," she answered coldly. "I shall not detain you any longer, Mr. Welsham," she added, rising.

She saw the look of disappointment come over Cecil's face, but it moved her to say more determinedly: "I could have sat only five minutes more."

Mr. Welsham uttered a few words. The poor painter was in an agony of embarrassment. Every one was silent, as Clara quickly put on her hat and gloves.

"I am a bad sitter, at the best. It would be useless to endeavour to paint me when another person is in the room," she said, in a higher falsetto key than usual, shaking hands with Mr. Welsham.

Cecil was close to the door; he opened it for her.

"I understand, Miss Saville," he said, gravely, bowing, "my presence is unpleasant

to you. I shall take care to spare you the annoyance of it. We shall not meet again."

As Miss Saville walked home, she was much perturbed in spirit. She teased and fretted herself for her behaviour. "Rude! unladylike!" she muttered to herself, thinking of the expression of mortification on Cecil's face. Then, as was her custom, she began to upbraid herself for meanness of spirit and weakness, and set to work vigorously to build up again her citadel of hatred and contempt. "What!" she said, "am I so weak, so simple, to be taken in by a few fair words? It was, indeed, a most plausible story—an excellent story. It is easy enough to play the part of a hero of renunciation when the opportunity of being one is past. Why did he not appear in that *rôle* before the lawsuit? I am a fool to think of him even with indulgence," she said, passionately. She strove to humiliate herself—to cover

herself with confusion ; but still that look came before her, and threw down, like a house of cards, the citadel of hatred and contempt she was trying to build up.

As she entered the grounds of the Towers, she met her mother's solicitor, who had come up on business relating to the property. Miss Saville was susceptible to physical influences. Still, as when she was a child, she recoiled from some people, as from crawling creatures whose passage was marked by a slimy track. Mr. Paulett was one of those who thus affected her. His yellow face, his deferential bows, and cynical expression exasperated her. She usually snubbed him, and always avoided him.

To-day, however, she stopped, saluted and invited him to walk a few steps back with her, to enlighten her on matters relating to the property. Mr. Paulett was elated, and launched into involved explana-

tions ; but although very silent, she was not listening. She suddenly brusquely interrupted him, to talk of that disgraceful lawsuit.

"I hear that we have been unjust," she said, slowly. "That you have taken a cruel view of the case, Mr. Paulett. My mother, also, has been mistaken all along. I hear that the son is actuated by very different motives from those that sway his father."

"Different motives ! Indeed ! I should like to know what they are !" exclaimed Mr. Paulett, shooting out his sentences, and looking at Clara with an expression of amused cynicism, the most chilling of all for an advocate to encounter. "Heedless folly and ruin, indeed, to institute a lawsuit if father and son were at issue about the result of it !"

"It is said, Mr. Cecil Latheby only cares to establish the fact of his ancestress'

marriage, to clear her fair fame," said Clara, bent upon subtly drawing Mr. Paulett on. "I understand that, having done so, he would publish the registry, and then renounce all claim to the property."

"Hey? What? Only publish the registry!—nothing more"—repeated Mr. Paulett, ducking his head from side to side, like an astonished bird. Hey, hey, hey! Let him find the registry! Give him the chance; then we'll see what he'll do," he continued, with a chuckle, striking out with his right arm.

"He is popular," Clara said, with a sidelong glance.

"Popular! *Of course* he is. Every man coming forward with a cock-and-bull story, if he can only get a hearing, will find fools to believe in him, plentiful as flies swarming over carrion. It's inherent in human nature, this weakness to caress the unbelievable. Don't be taken in by that

story, Miss Saville. Heroism on paper can be had by the ream, but for practical renunciation—my experience is a large one—and I may say I have never met with one genuine case of it."

"Well, I can understand," said Clara, with hesitation, "that it might be a temptation to the young man to gain the ancestral place if he had the chance."

"A temptation, I'll vouch for it, he would not resist," said Mr. Paulett, with conviction. "Take my word for it, Miss Saville, the young man is as greedy as his father of his visionary rights. Remember," continued the solicitor, in an insinuating voice, and with a side-long bow, "the attractions of a young lady like you might well tempt a young man to put his best foot forward."

"Oh," said Clara, coldly, "I have sufficiently showed what I felt."

After this conversation, Miss Saville had the satisfaction of feeling that she had got the better of that humiliating weakness. She had rooted out that seedling of credulity which had been growing, putting out shoots, and undermining her dignity and self-respect.

There was a dinner-party at the Towers that evening. Clara sat quiet as a mouse, and seemed to be thinking. Fred fancied that sometimes her eyes rested kindly on him. When the guests were all gone, and Mrs. Saville had fallen comfortably asleep in her arm-chair, Clara allowed him to sit near her, and even to hold her hand, without laughing at him for his pains. She told him, in confidence, that Mr. Cecil Latheby had come in, while she sat for her portrait, and that she had left at once. She gave a comical account of the meeting, and of Mr. Welsham's discomfiture. Fred laughed at

her story. She told it with effect. There was even a little added scorn in her tone against the "Young Pretender." She dwelt upon what an impostor he was—of the monstrous story he was setting afloat, that he stood aloof from his father's attempt to invalidate the sale of the Towers. Miss Saville wished to remove the suspicion from Fred's mind, that she had been won over; and no simpleton could have received with more unalloyed simplicity the impression she wished him to take. She looked with enchanting approval on him when he agreed: "Such chivalric renunciation needed proof, before it could be accepted as probable."

"Heroism on paper!" said Clara, with a little toss of her head, repeating Mr. Paulett's words. That evening she did not rebuke Fred when he talked of their marriage; of the time when he would take the name of

Saville, and strive to make it loved in Fareham, and honoured beyond that of the Lathebys.

As Fred walked home that night, his head touched the stars.

END OF VOL. I.

